



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



# "MONSIEUR LOVE."



By  
ETHEL COXON.





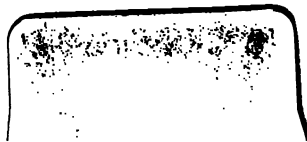
600064119R







600064119R







# “MONSIEUR LOVE.”

BY

ETHEL COXON.

“There’s no dallying with Love,  
Though he be a child and blind ;  
Then let none the danger prove,  
Who would to himself be kind ;  
Smile he does when thou dost play,  
But his smiles to death betray.”—SHEEBURNE.

*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.  
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1879.

[*Right of Translation Reserved.*]

251. f. 254





TO

MY FATHER'S OLD FRIEND,

ALFRED AUSTIN

I INSCRIBE THIS STORY.

7



## “MONSIEUR LOVE.”



### CHAPTER I.


“Calm’s not life’s crown, though calm is well.”

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

“**R**AYMOND MARCHANT, Esq.,  
15, St. Alban’s Court, Strand,  
London.” Victoire stamped  
her letter, and leant back in the low  
window seat at which she had been  
writing, pushing the dark hair from her  
brow, with the relieved sigh of one who  
had finished a task.

The "sweet doubtful din" of trees, and birds, and insects filled the afternoon with life, the clematis which clustered thickly round Victoire's window was hummed over by the bees, and from the field beyond the garden came the sharp sweep of the scythe, beneath which fell the Lammas crop. It was a lazy day, and Victoire seemed inclined to yield to its influence; she sat indolently twisting a spray of clematis in her hand, and with her eyes fixed on the flickering shadows of the creeper leaves on the white window-blind.

The letter to which hers was an answer, lay on a small table near her, a rather lengthy epistle, written in a delicate, distinct hand, such as young men affect nowadays in contradis-



---

tion, one must suppose, to the large style of script in which their sisters and sweethearts usually indulge; Victoire's writing was twice the size of her cousin's, whose letter this was. Part of it ran thus:

"You say you find it difficult to work on alone, and ask me to help you as to what you had better do. If you really find the plan we marked out together for your reading impracticable, why let it alone, and when I come to Polwhyn we will make a different arrangement. For the present, you had better stick to your Latin and German, and, if you can manage it don't drop algebra, it is just the kind of food your mind wants, and if you do not supply it with that

which it craves, it will feed on itself.

"I can read your state of mind from your letter, you are weary of life as it is, from thinking what it might be. I know your ideas of it are not the usual missish nonsense of girls of your age, if they were we should have little in common, but for all that, your restless state is not a healthy one, and remember, the future grows out of the present.

"I am rather sorry you happened to meet with 'Consuelo,' the dreamy mysticism of the second volume can do you no good, but it does not much matter after all.

"Does what I have written seem hard and cold, the letter of a school-master rather than a friend? If so,

---

forgive me, recollect my only wish is to save you future pain, and believe me dear,

"Ever your affectionate,

"RAYMOND MARCHANT."

Hardly a lover-like epistle, assuredly not an impassioned one, and yet written by a man who loved Victoire with his whole heart, though he had made a resolve, that till the girl was eighteen, no one, excepting one friend, and least of all the girl herself, should know of his feeling towards her. Victoire was English despite her French name, her father, Charles Treherne, had been the younger son of a Cornish squire, and had grievously offended his father by marrying at the age of twenty-five, and when dependent on him for every



thing beyond his pay as lieutenant in a cavalry regiment, a pretty, penniless French girl, governess in his colonel's family.

Mr. Treherne senior showed his appreciation of his son's unpatriotic and unfilial folly by depriving him of the allowance he had hitherto enjoyed, and refusing to see him or his wife; in which resolution he was sustained by Charles' mother, who felt her son's marriage even more keenly than did his father. Charles had been her favourite child, and all the bitterness of wounded love and fierce jealousy was aroused in her heart by his secret marriage, and her finding she was no longer first with him.

Charles and his wife struggled on bravely, love did not fly out of their


---

window, even though poverty came in at the door, and for the four years of their married life neither repented their choice; but there came a day when Victoire Treherne could work no longer, when a great silence filled the room where her still form lay, and where her husband knelt, clasping, oh how closely! the dead hand which had once laid so lovingly in his own.

Charles Treherne did not long survive his wife, he did not greatly care for life now that her sweet influence had left him, and at eight-and-twenty was a broken-down man. Only one thing troubled him when he was told he had not six months to live, the future of the little black-haired, large-eyed child, named Victoire after her mother.

This trouble was taken from him before he died, by his parents promising to take care of the little girl they had till now refused to see; the late reconciliation between the dying man and his parents was effected by his elder brother George, who had been his staunch friend through all.

For five years little Victoire lived with her grand-parents, then old Mr. Treherne died, and his widow, leaving the manor-house near Truro to her son and his wife, went with Victoire to live still further west. The death of her only brother, childless, had some years before put her in possession of his property, Polwhyn Manor, a rambling old building in the late Tudor style, which had belonged to the Tre-garthens, Mrs. Treherne's family, from



---

the time of its building, and to which now the last of them came back to spend her last years.

Polwhyn Manor stood rather apart from the village of the same name, and was ten miles removed from the nearest town. Here Victoire lived her youth, seeing very few people beyond the inhabitants of Polwhyn, her uncle, who with his wife paid a yearly visit to his mother, and Raymond Marchant, the son of her only aunt, Lois Treherne, who had married a man high in the Indian Civil Service, and who was still with her husband in Calcutta. They had sent their boy Raymond over to be educated in England, and he spent a great part of his holidays with his grandmother and cousin, who was six years his junior. He was now twenty-

three and reading for the bar; Victoire was nearly eighteen.

There was little society round Polwhyn, but it made no difference to Victoire, for Mrs. Treherne held rigidly aloof from what there was, saying that she was too old and Victoire too young for gaiety. There were other reasons too for her seclusion.

"I can't help it," she would say to the Rector's wife, Mrs. Onslow, when that lady hinted that Victoire was growing up and would need rather more society than she had at present. "If things were as they used to be, it would be different, but nearly all one's old friends, the Borlases, and Tremenheeres, and Archers have vanished, and to visit the old houses and find them filled up by a swarm of cuckoos who have

turned the old owners out, is more than I can stand; besides, I don't consider the Pentreaths gentlefolk—I can't, when I remember how old Pentreath, the grandfather of all these young men, whose fathers have bought up almost every old place for twenty miles round, used to stand in this very drawing-room, hat in hand, to receive my father's orders as to how many sacks of flour he should send us. Yes, I know they have sons in the Guards, and the Church, and the bar, and even an M.P. among them, alas! for poor old Cornwall! and are rolling in money—"

"And are well educated," put in the more liberal Mrs. Onslow. "I assure you William Pentreath's girls are charming."

"I daresay," said Mrs. Treherne, carelessly, "but even you, who can remember the Tredethlis, can't say that the Pentreaths look like them; why if Cissy Tredethlis had been veiled so that you could only see her nail-tips, you could have sworn she was well born,—and then their voices and their large ears! No, I know I am an old fashioned Tory and behind the times; but as long as I drive past those disgusting tan-pits at Penlash, and see the mills the Pentreaths used to work in with their own hands, I can't forget they are tanners and millers in the fact that they are bankers as well."

"But will you not let Victoire go out at all?"

"Not if I am to chaperone her


amidst a ruck of Pentreaths and Bidfords with their second-hand London graces. When she needs gaiety, which won't be for three years or more, I shall send her off to Julia at Truro for a month or two at a time."

So a few very heavy morning calls of twenty minutes were all the dissipation Mrs. Treherne allowed herself, and even on these Victoire did not accompany her. Now and then invitations for her did come from one or another of the despised Pentreaths; but Mrs. Treherne always declined them as courteously as she always greeted the obnoxious *parvenus* on the rare occasions when she and they met. Her own ladyhood was strong in her, and though she might abuse the social system which



admitted of Pentreaths ousting the old families, and might hold herself aloof from the interlopers, still when chance threw her against them, they could never have guessed her estimate of them from that reserved yet exquisite courtesy which made them speak of her as "that charming old Mrs. Treherne."

Victoire had never wished for gaiety, as some girls might have in her place; she lived her own life, and it was rather a peculiar one. If vague longings flitted across her for something beyond her present existence, they were rather for an expansion than a change of experience. She was restless, perhaps even discontented, but she was very happy, only at seventeen one must beat against the bars and cry "I can't get



out," when so much seems possible to one free from bondage.

She rose at length from the window-seat and stood as if doubting what to do, then taking down a broad-brimmed hat from the wall where it hung, she ran down the wide oak stairs into the small library; the house was very quiet, all the servants were out haymaking, and Mrs. Treherne was enjoying her usual *siesta* in the drawing-room. Victoire was secure from interruption, free to do as she pleased. She pulled down from its place on the shelves an old, calf-bound, octavo book, one of a long row of fellow volumes; the gold of its lettering was tarnished, its back broken by much reading, "Dodsley's Drama," Vol. IV.

Reading her book she left the house,

and striking across the garden away from the hay-field, from whence she could hear the laughter and talk of the haymakers, she crossed a stile which separated the orchard from a grassy field, where Mrs. Treherne's beautiful Alderneys were now peacefully grazing.

She made a pretty picture in the afternoon sunlight, as she lingered by the hedge to pull down a straggling branch of honeysuckle that hung waving above her head in the clear blue air; her up-reaching attitude showing the slender rounded lines of her figure in its plain brown holland dress, with no ornament but two damask roses at the collar, from which rose the long white curve of throat and neck, supporting the delicate head, and the soft yet crisp

waves of black hair, gathered in a thick knot at the back.

The clear oval of the face, lacking vivid colour, more than atoned for the defect by fairness and fineness; plenty of fault might be found with the face, the pretty nose was slightly unclassical, the curved lips too wide for perfect beauty, the black line of the brows perhaps a thought too decided, but there criticism ended: it could not touch the broad low forehead, or the beautiful eyes, dark grey, soft and deep, with thick black lashes.

Crossing the stile into the field, she quickened her speed; the field was a hilly sweep of ground, studded with noble trees, the very place in which to dream away a summer afternoon, but it was not Victoire's goal, to-day at least.



## CHAPTER II.

*Prospero.* "The fringed curtains of thine eye advance,  
And say what see'st thou yond."

*Miranda.* "What is't? a spirit?

Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,  
It carries a brave form."

TEMPEST, *Act I, Scene 2.*

"Shall I not take mine ease at mine inn?"

HENRY IV.

**V**ICTOIRE rambled slowly up the  
hill, still intent on her book,  
till she came to a low stone  
wall that separated the field from a  
wood: another moment and the barrier  
was crossed.

---

The wood was not very large but it was very beautiful, it would have been a paradise to a fern collector, a green delight to an artist, had either kind of enthusiast discovered it; but neither had, and Victoire loved it because it was the one place where she could feel herself absolutely alone and lady of her leisure. The wood was seldom or never invaded by any one but herself.

It sloped gradually down to a trout stream, which further up was much frequented by the village anglers; but the fishing of that part which ran through the wood belonged to Mrs. Treherne, and was forbidden to the Polwhyn boys, as was the wood to Polwhyn in general.

It is true that Mrs. Treherne had

licensed the innkeeper of the village to allow any brother of the angle, who chanced to stay at Polwhyn, to practise his craft in those otherwise forbidden waters ; but visitors to Polwhyn were so rare that her courtesy was of small avail ; the trout were left in peace except when Raymond Marchant was at the manor, and Victoire enjoyed her sovereignty of the wood undisturbed.

Reaching a small and level piece of turf, she threw down her book, tossed her hat aside, and paced up and down, studying in her mind what she had read ; then she began to repeat a scene of the play, slowly at first, considering each sentence, pondering how to give every word its just weight and expression, repeating each speech till she was in some manner satisfied with her de-

---

livery of it: in short, studying a part, and studying it with a rare, though untaught, artistic sense of its meaning, with an earnest delight in its beauty which were the natural outcome of the dramatic instinct that was strong within her—strong though she had only been to a theatre, and that a provincial one, twice in her life—strong though never encouraged or even guessed at, so strong that this stolen exercise of it was the greatest pleasure of her life.

She had studied enough for to-day, she took two steps forward and stood, no longer Victoire Treherne, but Duchess of Malfi.

She acted most of the chief scenes, speaking the other parts in a low voice, playing that of the Duchess with an untutored passion and pathos



which showed capabilities for great things.

Her slight form, drawn up to its full height, seemed to grow into majesty, her voice clearer and sweeter, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled and shone, the whole girl was transformed. Her acting was untaught and imperfect, it could not be otherwise, but she felt the power of the part as few women could, she would have made an audience feel it too.

"I am Duchess of Malfi still!"

The tortured outburst of the goaded woman's pride and agony burst from her lips with such fierce passion, as to fairly startle a listener who was watching her from behind a clump of trees.

---

He had been tranquilly fishing when the sound of the girl's voice aroused him, and on his taking a few steps in the direction it came from, he had caught sight of her between the branches of the trees; the sight had made him steal to his present place of vantage, from whence he had beheld Victoire's performance, and had been much puzzled by it.

"Who was she?" he thought, this girl who found pleasure in rehearsing Webster's passionate tragedy to herself, and acted as though she felt every throb of pain with the woman she represented? She was not an actress, her inexperience and her absence of all stage tricks showed him that, she certainly was not an amateur trained to a feeble reading of vaudevilles and farces, and she

|

was very unlike the usual stage-struck girl.

A rustling in the bushes betrayed his presence, she turned round startled and her eye caught his; her whole face crimsoned with an intense blush. He saw that further concealment was impossible, and for a moment doubted whether to stand or fly, then he thought the former course would give her the least pain and stepped forward.

"I beg your pardon," he said gently.

The girl did not answer, but stood still and quiet, the burning colour faded fast away, leaving her very pale.

The oddity of their meeting seemed to do away with formality, and he felt he must make his peace.

"You are offended," he continued. "I am very much ashamed."

---

"It was not you," she managed to stammer. "It was——" and then the remembrance of her mimic passion overcame her, and the retreating blush again swept over her face.

She raised her eyes as she spoke, and they met his in a questioning gaze; she never forgot that man as she saw him stand facing her that day.

The stranger was about twenty-eight, tall and slight, with a figure which, though perfect in its build, was more graceful than powerful; unconsciously to herself, Victoire's eyes took in almost every detail of his face, the pale olive skin, the finely poised head, the graceful throat.

His eyes were large and languid, with thick, dark fringes, the nose and chin almost Greek in their perfection, the

cheeks rather thin, the forehead good, not very wide but open and well shaped, and the hair pushed back in a large curve from the delicate temples was dark brown, as was the silky moustache which veiled the rather short upper lip. A face almost feminine in its beauty, but redeemed from weakness by the strength of the well moulded chin.

"I behaved very badly," he said, and as he spoke the faintest ripple of a smile trembled round his mouth.

Victoire, too, almost smiled as she forgot her shyness and said spontaneously,

"No, but it must have seemed so foolish."

"Indeed it did not," he said eagerly; then he checked the praise of her acting which was on his lips, and continued,

"Will you really forgive me my impertinent intrusion?"

"You had a right to be in the wood," said Victoire, and there was something in her voice that his fine ear caught, and which made him answer,

"But no right to spy on you; I know it, so ask again—pardon."

Victoire, with a frank impulse, held out her hand; the child had been brought up in such ignorance of the world that the idea she was sinning against Mrs. Grundy's code of propriety never entered her mind.

Her companion, while he marvelled at her frankness, did not abuse it; he took the little hand, felt its delicate pulse beat against his, then unloosed it quietly, and stooping down, picked up the book which lay unheeded

on the grass and looked at its title.


"You choose your study from good sources," he said smiling, Victoire felt the power of his smile; it was hardly brilliant, but very sweet, and rendered his face wonderfully winning, all the more that his usual expression was rather moody than otherwise—the look of a man not blessed with a good temper, "but do you not find the Duchess rather a difficult part?"

He spoke so simply that Victoire answered as naturally,

"Yes, it seems so difficult not to make her a Fury; but then, you know, I can't act it really."

"Can't you?" his voice was rather amused.

"Are you laughing?" she asked,



looking up at him with her honest eyes.

He did not know what to make of this girl, so quaintly frank and simple, yet evidently with a mind of her own ; she was a kind of woman he was unacquainted with, and she interested him.

"I am not laughing," he answered. "Seriously, will you be angry if I say that your acting was a great pleasure to me, that I never ——?" he paused; if he finished his sentence, the praise would be too broad, the girl could do it herself.

A sudden glance of pleasure brightened her face, it was not the look of gratified vanity, rather that of aroused ambition.

"Do you really think I could act?"



---

"I am sure of it, but ——"

The clanging sound of the tea bell from the Manor interrupted them, Victoire started.

"I must go," she said, again holding out her hand to her new acquaintance.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

He watched her as she left the wood, noting the slender grace of her figure, the perfect carriage of her little head. She turned to look back as she reached the boundary of the wood and nodded a gay adieu, he raised his hat in reply.

"I wonder who she is," was his reflection as he unjointed his neglected trout-rod and prepared to depart. "The daughter of the rector, or the squire, I suppose. I wonder if her friends sus-

pect her tastes, I should imagine not. An odd way of finding an embryo Rachel; if I were a manager now, instead of what I am, I should think of improving my chance, but as it is — How handsome she looked! and what a voice, an enthusiast too; she would be worth training. Well! it is nothing to me."

He took a cigar from his case and striking a light, prepared to stroll homeward, when his eye fell on the book that he had laid down on an oak trunk, and which Victoire had forgotten.

"Queer reading for a young lady," he meditated. "I may as well take care of it on the chance of meeting her again," saying which, he slipped the book into his pocket.

"Did you have good fishing, Sir?"

inquired Mrs. Cornish, the landlady of the 'Polwhyn Arms,' on the young man's return to that hostelry, at which he was putting up.

"Capital, see here!" and he opened his basket, "I must stay longer here than I intended."

"Aye! the fishing in the Riggan is good," assented mine hostess; "and it's best of all by Madam Treherne's wood, where I told Jim to take you."

"Madam Treherne!" said the young man. "Who is she? Your squire's wife?"

"No, Sir, the daughter of our old squire, who died thirty years ago, before I married Cornish. Madam Treherne's brother had no children, so when he died, the property fell to her, and when her husband died too, she came

to live here with her grand-daughter, Miss Victory."

Miss Victory, that must have been the girl he met in the wood.

By dint of questioning, he extracted Victoire's history from Mrs. Cornish, and hearing how quiet the girl's life had been, wondered all the more from whence she had derived her dramatic instinct.

"She isn't what to call pretty," said Mrs. Cornish, "but she has a way with her, you know, Sir."

"I dare say," said the young man in a bored tone; he had no wish to hear any more of his hostess's anecdotes.

"Will you have some of the trout you caught for dinner, Sir?" said Mrs. Cornish, lingering at the door of her guest's sitting-room.

"Yes, thank you," but the tone was

almost irritable, and Mrs. Cornish was glad to escape.

"Though he's as handsome a young man as I've ever set eyes on," she said to her husband, who was engaged in tapping a cask of nut-brown ale in the cellar, "Master Raymond couldn't hold a candle to him."

"Master Raymond's straight and well set up enough," grunted her lord as he turned the tap at last, and let a deep hued gleaming stream froth into a Toby jug.

"Ah! but this one's different to him," said his wife, "though he has a short way with him like, which I don't understand. He can be pleasant enough when he chooses, but just now I thought he'd bite the nose off my face."

Her husband replied with some sar-

castic, though nearly inaudible remark to the effect, that the clack of a woman's tongue was enough to justify such a proceeding, which observation caused his wife to push his bent head against the barrel, with a careless but affectionate movement of her hand, and reply,

"None of that, old man, for I won't stand the nonsense. There, if you've drawn his ale, give it for me to take up, the trout are ready."

"Here it is," said her husband, rising, "but I wonder you aint afeeart."

"You let me be, there isn't a man in the world who could feart me, and least of all you, John Cornish."



### CHAPTER III.

*"Beauty, truth and rarity,  
Grace in all simplicity."*

THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE.

**V**ICTOIRE, on reaching home, found a guest arrived there, who had not been expected till the morrow, her Uncle George, who had come to Polwhyn about some law business of his mother's.

"Well, Victoire," he said, when the usual greetings and inquiries were over, "where have you been? I've been wait-

ing for you to pour out my tea these ten minutes."

"In the wood," said Victoire, and to her vexation felt herself blushing furiously; she did not in the least mind telling of her meeting with the stranger, but she did not wish to inform her grandmother and uncle of her dramatic studies, and she found that in narrating her adventure, it would be difficult to omit all mention of the circumstances which led to it.

"In the wood," repeated her grandmother, "I thought, Vic, you were haymaking."

"It was so hot, grandmamma; and I was tired with writing to Raymond."

"Ah! Raymond, how is he?" said her uncle, and on her grandmother answering, Victoire had time to collect



her scattered thoughts, and take her place quietly before the tea-table and the tea-pot.

A Cornish tea is a meal fearful and wonderful to those who dread dyspepsia, delightful to the happier mortals in whose ears indigestion is as yet an idle word. The tea-table that evening at Polwhyn Manor was a pretty picture, laid out as it was in the cedar parlour, the glory of the old house, quaintly furnished, and sweet with the scent of great bow-pots of flowers which Victoire had gathered that morning. The comes-tibles included a rosy ham, home cured, a cold chicken, greenly adorned with parsley, a dish of junket, a large bowl of clotted cream, a huge saffron cake, and that most marvellous specimen of Cornish cookery, a smoking dish of

---

heavy cake, which delicacy, when cut open, spread with honey and cream, and closed again à la sandwich, is a thing that a Londoner can only shudder at, but which a west-countryman or woman devours wholesale with a placid contempt for the poor creatures who cannot follow their example; besides the tea, there stood by the side of Mr. Treherne's plate, a large jug of cider.

The party round the tea-table was picturesque, Mrs. Treherne, a model old lady, still bore the remains of past beauty in her delicate, aquiline features, ivory skin and keen blue eyes, and her refined high-bred manner was the extreme of polished grace.

Mr. Treherne was worthy of his mother; a handsome man, bearing his fifty years lightly, and a noble example of

those Cornish gentlemen who inherit their straight features, tawny hair and sea-blue eyes from Elizabethan heroes, and gallant, reckless cavaliers.

In strong contrast to both of her companions, showed Victoire's slim young grace; wonderfully charming she looked this evening, and her fairness struck her uncle, as did the fact, that it was a pity such a girl should be kept in the utter seclusion of her present life.

These reflections made him ask a little later on.

"How old are you, Victoire?"

"Eighteen next January, Uncle George."

"A woman already. I have been thinking, mother, that if Julia and I go up to London next spring ——"

"Do you intend to?"

---

"I think so, we are growing into regular country cabbages, haven't left Cornwall for the last four years, so now that Master Charlie is sent to school, his mother thinks she would like some dissipation; and as I said, if we go, you must let us take this child along with us."

Victoire's eyes glowed with pleasure, but sobered down again as her grandmother answered,

"My dear George, you hardly know what you are saying, Vic is quite a child yet, I don't mean her to come out till she is twenty."


The word rubbish was on Mr. Treherne's tongue, but he was really fond of his niece, and knowing that a hasty answer might ruin her chance of pleasure, only said,

"She is very nearly a woman, and at all events she needs finishing lessons which she could have in London. Anyhow, our visit is very far distant yet."

"I will think of it," said Mrs. Treherne. "Victoire, half a cup more tea, if there is any. You haven't finished surely, George?"

"I have eaten as heartily as the Cornish giant in Jack the Giant Killer," said her son, rising from the table. "What a glorious evening, look at those flame-coloured clouds; it will be a fine day to-morrow, I shall try for some trout."

He was absently looking at Victoire as he spoke, and was astonished to see her colour mount at his harmless observation.



"What are you colouring for child?" he said laughing. "You certainly haven't lost what Dr. Gregory called the most powerful charm of female beauty—the trick of blushing. What have you done? Poisoned the fish or broken the rod I left here."

Victoire laughed rather nervously, as she piled the tea-things on the tray, ready for the servant to clear away; but she did not answer her uncle's question, except by a shake of the head.

"Uncle George," she said at last.

"Niece Victoire."

"If I found a ripe peach for you from your favourite tree, do you think you could eat it."

"I should try at all events," answered Mr. Treherne, "Polwhyn peaches are like no others."

Victoire needed no more, she left the room and sought the garden bending her steps in the direction of the tree she had spoken of.

The peach had been partly an excuse for escaping to her own society; she felt nervous and restless though she could not have told why. The calm of the garden, the soft evening air helped to soothe the disquiet she was hardly conscious of herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Treherne, left alone, looked at each other.

"Mother," at last the former exclaimed, "that child has grown up since I was here last."

"All girls do at her age."

"What a graceful creature she is, and as a child she was almost plain. Mother," suddenly. "Have you thought over the

natural consequence of throwing her and Raymond so much together now that they are no longer children?"


Mrs. Treherne was startled and showed it. "What do you mean?" she answered. "There is no danger; they have known each other too long. It is ridiculous."

"I am not sure," returned her son. "Familiarity breeds contempt, of course, but Raymond and Victoire have not been too much together, so as to destroy their ideals of one another, and yet they meet often enough for a fondness to grow up."

Mrs. Treherne moved impatiently in her chair, the notion seemed to annoy her.

"I dislike cousins marrying," she observed.

"So do I."





Victoire needed no more, she left the room and sought the garden bending her steps in the direction of the tree she had spoken of.

The peach had been partly an excuse for escaping to her own society; she felt nervous and restless though she could not have told why. The calm of the garden, the soft evening air helped to soothe the disquiet she was hardly conscious of herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Treherne, left alone, looked at each other.

"Mother," at last the former exclaimed, "that child has grown up since I was here last."

"All girls do at her age."

"What a graceful creature she is, and as a child she was almost plain. Mother," suddenly. "Have you thought over the

---

natural consequence of throwing her and Raymond so much together now that they are no longer children?"

Mrs. Treherne was startled and showed it. "What do you mean?" she answered. "There is no danger; they have known each other too long. It is ridiculous."

"I am not sure," returned her son. "Familiarity breeds contempt, of course, but Raymond and Victoire have not been too much together, so as to destroy their ideals of one another, and yet they meet often enough for a fondness to grow up."

Mrs. Treherne moved impatiently in her chair, the notion seemed to annoy her.

"I dislike cousins marrying," she observed.

"So do I."

greatly irritated, "utterly absurd, why Raymond has nothing but what his father allows him; he can't support himself, much less a wife; however," in a more cheerful tone, "even if they do care for each other, it is only a boy and girl fancy quite easy to break off."

"I am not so certain; with another man it might be so, but Raymond is like his father, he has that dogged determination which nothing can move."

"And Victoire?"

"You ought to know best about her, being a woman; but if I don't mistake, Victoire is so ignorant of her own heart, that she would marry the first man who asked her, through pure gratitude, and not liking to be so rude as to refuse him."

Mrs. Treherne smiled in spite of herself.

"There is more in Vic than that," she said, "but I don't know what the world is coming to."

"Something very dreadful when a young man and a girl being thrown together—— Well, Victoire, here you are, and my peach, where is it?"

"Look here," and she displayed three velvety globes glowing with mingled tints of faint yellow and rose and purple. "Do they tempt you?"

"You true daughter of Eve! What if I say no?"

"I shall think you very ungrateful, that is all."

She sat down by her uncle's side as he eat his peaches, but refused to share in the feast. Her brow was a little drawn down, she had just remembered that she had lost her book in the wood,

and resolved that she must go and look for it the first thing the next morning, before anyone else was up. It would be annoying if she could not find it, she was fond of it, and besides that, its loss would spoil the set, and she would have to confess she had lost it to Mrs. Treherne, and be scolded for carelessness.

Perhaps, after all, her acquaintance of the wood had found it. If so, what should she do? He did not know her name or where to send it, and she might not see him again. She did not know if he were staying at Polwhyn, or only there for a day.

Victoire did not wish to see him again, she hoped she should not as she remembered how he had first discovered her and yet——

It was growing dark, the lamp was brought in, but the curtains left undrawn and the windows open, that the inhabitants of the room might feel the freshness of the night. Mrs. Treherne took to her knitting; Mr. Treherne was deep in a copy of the *Field* that he had brought with him; Victoire sat resting her elbows on the table that held the lamp, her chin was buried in her small hands, and all her thoughts apparently bent on the book before her.

After a time, her uncle looking up from his paper, watched her; he noted how seldom she turned a page, yet saw that she was reading, and thinking as well.

"What have you there?" he said at last.

"Something stupid," she answered, "Göthe's *Iphigenia*. It is very heavy."

"Then why read it?"

"Raymond told me to."

The simply obedient tone amused Mr. Treherne, he looked at his mother but seeing she had fallen asleep, said,

"So Raymond is still your tutor?"

"Yes, he is very kind and helps me a great deal; but he does give me such stupid things to read, first 'Hermann and Dorothea,' then Schiller's 'Thirty Years War,' and now this," said Victoire eyeing with great distaste the thin volume before her.

"Put it away now, you have done quite enough."

Victoire showed no unwillingness to obey; she put the book aside and produced a piece of point lace of unrivalled fineness, that she was engaged in working.

"You will ruin your eyes with that rubbish," said her uncle, laughing.

The threatened eyes flashed back a saucy defiance.

"Haven't you anything interesting to tell me," she said, after a short pause.

"No adventures?"

"Now what adventures, except a railway accident, can a middle aged gentleman of the nineteenth century meet with in travelling from Truro to St. Ives?"

"I don't know," said Victoire demurely.

"Have you been to St. Ives then?"

"I slept there last night. I left Truro yesterday and went straight to St. Ives about this law business, then came on here. No adventures, unless you call this one," he drew from his waistcoat pocket a quaintly chased and evidently valuable



Victoire needed no more, she left the room and sought the garden bending her steps in the direction of the tree she had spoken of.


The peach had been partly an excuse for escaping to her own society; she felt nervous and restless though she could not have told why. The calm of the garden, the soft evening air helped to soothe the disquiet she was hardly conscious of herself.

Mr. and Mrs. Treherne, left alone, looked at each other.

"Mother," at last the former exclaimed, "that child has grown up since I was here last."

"All girls do at her age."

"What a graceful creature she is, and as a child she was almost plain. Mother," suddenly. "Have you thought over the



---

natural consequence of throwing her and Raymond so much together now that they are no longer children?"

Mrs. Treherne was startled and showed it. "What do you mean?" she answered. "There is no danger; they have known each other too long. It is ridiculous."

"I am not sure," returned her son. "Familiarity breeds contempt, of course, but Raymond and Victoire have not been too much together, so as to destroy their ideals of one another, and yet they meet often enough for a fondness to grow up."

Mrs. Treherne moved impatiently in her chair, the notion seemed to annoy her.

"I dislike cousins marrying," she observed.

"So do I."

---

there was this locket and an ornament of two serpents' heads in gold."

For one moment Victoire wondered where she had seen such a chain, then she remembered.

"My companion got out at Redruth," said her uncle, "and five minutes afterwards I found this locket on the floor of the carriage, it must have slipped from the swivel ring."

"What do you mean to do, Uncle George?"

"Advertise it in the *Times*, of course. I suppose I ought to have made it over to the railway authorities, but I never thought of that till I reached here."

"Do you know I think,—I can't be sure—but I think I saw your very fellow-traveller here to-day."

"Here ! Where?"



---

"In the wood, he was fishing; and I noticed his chain, it was like the one you describe."


"He told me he was on a fishing expedition," pondered Mr. Treherne. "It is just possible it may be he. What was your acquaintance like?"

"Rather tall and dark, but pale, handsome, as you say, and with a moustache, but no beard or whiskers."

"That's right. If it be he, I suppose, from his fishing in the Riggan, that he is stopping at the 'Polwhyn Arms;' I'll go down there on the chance."

"To-night, Uncle George?"

"Of course. He might start early to-morrow morning. I'll be off now; if grandmamma wakes, tell her I have gone down to the inn, you needn't say anything else."



A woman would have pestered Victoire with questions as to whether she had spoken to her friend of the wood, how she had fallen in with him, and a thousand other queries ; Mr. Treherne adopted the sounder and safer policy of leaving her alone, he knew she was to be trusted, so allowed her to keep what she pleased to herself.

He put on his hat, took his walking-stick, and leaving the house, went his way towards the village.

The young man he was in quest of had by this time finished his dinner, and was sitting tranquilly smoking by the window ; a small table with a lamp on it was drawn up to his side, and in his hand was the book Victoire had forgotten.

" A loss yesterday," he meditated,

"and a gain to-day; not of quite as much value though as my locket. I wonder what has become of it, hang it!— I wish I could, on my chain."

The lamplight shining on his handsome face softened and refined it, but could not take away its weary expression of bored annoyance; the last are strong words, but I know no others to use.

He turned Victoire's book over page by page, but did not read it. Truth to say, his thoughts were engaged with the girl herself. He wondered if her simplicity were real; he was so accustomed to pretty trickeries, that in pondering over their meeting, for a few moments he did Victoire the injustice of suspecting her manner might be a new form of coquetry.

He did not think so, he knew something of women, and the girl's honest, earnest look was either nature or a miraculous perfection of art—he thought the former.

She was pretty too, *gracieuse*, charming in her innocence.

At this point, Frank Lyndon became conscious that Victoire had occupied his thoughts for the last quarter of an hour; he uttered an impatient exclamation, and throwing down the book, rose from his seat and looked out of the window.

His attention was attracted by a dark figure striding along the road; it stopped at the door, entered the porch, and as the window of Frank's sitting-room was open, he could hear the dialogue between his hostess and the new arrival.

"What! Mr. Treherne! Well, Sir, it is a pleasure to see you. Where's John? Here! John, come up. He is in the cellar, Sir."

"Don't interrupt him then. Well, Mrs. Cornish, how does the world treat you; as well as ever?"

"Quite, Sir; we've nothing to complain of, and we've been wonderful lucky this year with the apples, they are beautiful in these parts; how are they near Truro?"

"Oh! very well, there will be a fine gathering this year; at least, I hope so."

"Will you walk into the parlour, Sir, and have some ale, or cider, or cherry-brandy; I know you like my cherry-brandy?"

"No, thank you, not to-night; I came



on another errand. You have a gentleman staying here?"

"Yes, Sir, Mr. Lyndon. Do you know him, Sir?"

"Well, I'm not quite certain; will you show me to his room?"

"Certainly, Sir," and the listener above heard the steps first retreating inward and then nearing his own room.

The door opened and Mr. Treherne entered, the other man rose.

"I've come to restore your lost property," said Mr. Treherne, holding out the locket. "I was telling my little niece how I found it, and she thought it must be you, whom she saw in the wood to-day."

So this was Victoire's uncle, and she had mentioned their meeting; Frank

wondered if she had told Mr. Treherne of its attendant circumstances : he hardly fancied so.

"I am very grateful to you," he answered, as he took the trinket from Mr. Treherne. "It is an odd coincidence our meeting here again."

"So odd, I thought I had better not let the chance of finding you slip, and came down here to-night fearing that you might have flown by the morning."

"Thanks. No, I think of staying here some days ; the fishing is good and I want a quiet place."

"Then Polwhyn will suit you, for it is the dullest village in the whole kingdom."

"Is it?" said the young man, with a half smile, as at some thought of his own. "Won't you sit down?" he added,


"and if you care for a weed, I think these are tolerable," as he opened a cigar-case and offered it to Mr. Treherne.

"Thank you," said the latter gentleman, accepting the invitation and the light which his host proffered. "Did you have good sport to-day, Mr. ——"

"Lyndon," said the young man, a curious expression passing over his handsome face as he spoke—a look at once proud, defiant and shy, mingled with an odd personal distaste.

Mr. Treherne did not notice it; he showed moreover no recognition of the name, and Frank Lyndon looked rather relieved though a little annoyed, the relief, however, preponderated.

"Yes, I had capital sport," he answered, and his voice was not the least winning thing about him.



Mr. Treherne stayed an hour or so with his new acquaintance, and at the end of that time, though he had learnt but little of his personal affairs, was at least assured that he was a gentleman and a charming fellow, which was perfectly true.

They parted mutually pleased with each other, having arranged to fish in company on the morrow; just as they were separating, Frank pondered for a moment whether he should deliver Victoire's book to her uncle.

He decided he had better not.






## CHAPTER IV.

"Es fällt ein Stern herunter,  
Aus seiner funkelnden Höh!  
Das ist der Stern der Liebe  
Den ich dort fallen seh."

Seine.

" MUST think of getting home."  
It was Mr. Treherne spoke,  
he and Frank were by the side  
of the Riggan, three or four miles from  
Polwhyn, on the evening of the day  
following that of Mr. Lyndon's meeting  
with Victoire.

"Won't you come with me?" said Mr. Treherne, as they collected their fishing gear. "My mother will be delighted to see you, and if you can put up with a Cornish high tea, such as we barbarians prefer to dinner, your society will be a boon."

Frank assented gladly to the proposal, and Mr. Treherne calling to the boy who was in attendance on him, bade him harness the pony-cart at once.

The two men had a charming drive home in the golden evening, between the sweeps of rich grass-land and the apple-laden orchards of the fair west country which, with all its cultivation, has a charm and wildness of beauty unknown to the inland counties, or even to fruitful Kent.

But as they reached Polwhyn Manor

all the beauty of the scene, the mellow clearness of the amber western sky, became but the background and setting of a picture to Frank Lyndon's eyes—the picture of a slender girl in a white dress, standing in the old fashioned garden with a small syringe in her hand, with which she was watering the leaves of some rose-trees.

Frank thought how different this girl in her tranquil grace seemed to the passion-fraught maiden he had yesterday surprised in the wood; but he was accustomed to transitions quite as sudden, and lost all thought of it as she turned her face at hearing the sound of wheels and came forward to the carriage-path.

"I have brought home a guest, Victoire," said her uncle, jumping out of the

---

pony-trap. "Mr. Lyndon, my niece, Miss Treherne."

Frank's and Victoire's eyes met as they acknowledged the introduction, and a smile flashed over the faces of both. The half-laughing sweetness of his struck Victoire with a sense of something new and fresh in life; the gladness remained as she ran indoors to see that warm water and soap, and clean, lavender-scented towels were duly placed in a spare room ready for Frank's use, and then descended the stairs two at a time, and entered the cedar parlour where her uncle and grandmother were sitting.

"Pull the blind up a little, Vic," said Mrs. Treherne, "the glare of the sun isn't so bad now."

Victoire obeyed; she was standing by the window as Frank entered the room,



the warm light falling on her shoulder, the line of her throat and cheek, and a great red rose she had stuck in her hair.

"She would show well on the stage," was Mr. Lyndon's first thought, his second was disgust at his first. Why should anything so delicate and rare as this girl be lowered, vulgarised, and dragged down from her own higher sphere by the blighting touch of the coarse stage realities? Acting, as he had seen her do the evening before, unconscious of any audience but the trees, was a different thing, it was in harmony with the poetry of her nature and appearance; but to know of her behind the scenes of a London theatre, exposed to the dirt and dustiness, the roughness and lack of refinement, both literal and metaphorical,

---

that he knew so well and hated so intensely—the mere thought was horrible to him; as well take one of her own tall white lilies to place as a wand in the hand of a stage fairy. No, leave the flower in its stately innocence, do not let that pure face be soiled by the stage paint and powder; pinchbeck would do quite as well for the pantomime wand, would glitter more, and would not wither as the flower would.

He watched her as she took her place at the head of the tea-table, noted every turn of her hand, every varying expression of her face, yet did not seem to watch her. She did not say much, nor did Frank attempt to draw her out; but devoted himself to Mrs. Treherne, who thought him a very charming young man of quite the old school of manners.

"Excuse me," she said at last, "but we West country people are famous for not being able to keep our hands, or rather our tongues, off genealogies; are you any relation of that Colonel Richard Lyndon, one of the Hants' Lyndons, who—(ah, dear! it must be more than fifty-four years ago!)—married Marian Borlase?"

"He was my grandfather," Frank answered, "but he died before I was born."

The old lady sighed a little.

"Ah, yes!" she said, "how old one feels! I am nearly the only one left of those I knew in my girlhood; but I am glad to see you, Mr. Lyndon, your grandmother was my dearest and oldest friend."

She had only bowed to Frank when

---

her son had introduced him, now she stretched out her thin high-bred hand, wrinkled but white, across the table towards him.

"I think you are like her," the old lady said, after a steady gaze, "but you have your grandfather's eyes."

A slight expression of amusement, not unmixed with vexation flitted across Mr. Lyndon's face; Victoire, watching him, understood it, for she disliked of all things to have her personal appearance commented on before people.

"Yes; you have something of him," said Mrs. Treherne rather sadly. "How well I remember the time Marian and I first saw him. It was at the Assembly Rooms at Bath. We had been taken there for the season. People didn't think

it necessary to take girls to London then, George."


Her son laughed.

"I shall have to remind you again, mother, that railways were unknown."

"Well!" said Mrs. Treherne with a pettish gesture, "we will not quarrel about it. I was speaking of Colonel Lyndon, captain he was then. He was a Waterloo man, Waterloo had been fought five years then; but we girls remembered it well, and were dying to be introduced to a real, live hero; we thought a great deal of Waterloo."

"As much, Victoire, as your mother did of the Crimea," said Uncle George to his niece.

Victoire raised her beautiful eyes gratefully to her uncle, her mother's was tacitly an interdicted name between her



and her grandmother, and the girl was thankful to Mr. Treherne for speaking it freely.

Mrs. Treherne made no remark on the interruption.

"I remember," she said, bending a little towards Mr. Lyndon, "a friend coming up to Marian and myself where we sat together, like two shy school-girls as we were, and pointing out Captain Lyndon to us, telling us what a terrible, wild fellow he was."


"He had a bad reputation then," said Frank, his smile gleaming forth.

"People said so. I never saw any reason for it myself," said Mrs. Treherne, *naïvely*. "He was introduced to both of us that evening, and afterwards, when Marian and I (she was staying with us) were in our bed-room together, she told

me she would never marry any other man, she would have him, or die an old maid. Yes, I always liked Colonel Lyndon."

Over the delicate, faded face passed a strange look that none there understood. The memory of a young love, of the growing fancy bravely crushed, when the girl found she might stand between her friendship and happiness, of a self-denial, a strength of friendship never guessed at even by her for whom it had been called forth; all this was in Mildred Treherne's memory, this dead, long-forgotten story, revived in her heart as she looked at the grandson of Richard Lyndon and Marian Borlase.

"Your grandmother died," she continued, "three years after her marriage, and I lost sight of Colonel Lyndon after



I married. Is your father alive? I remember him such a pretty baby."

Her hearers smiled for a moment; but there was the faintest quiver in Frank's voice as he answered.

"He is dead, he died ten years ago, not long after my mother. I was their only child."

There was a moment's silence, then Mrs. Treherne said gently.

"I beg your pardon if I appear rude, but it is the prerogative of old women to be inquisitive. Are you of your grandfather's profession? I heard once by chance that his son was."

"No," a dark red flush mounted to the young man's cheek. "I was in the navy, I retired eight years ago."

"Surely, he was not expelled," was Mr. Treherne's thought, as he noted




Frank's face; but Mr. Lyndon's next words set him at ease.

"I never liked the profession, and an attack of Indian fever gave me an excuse for leaving it, a very slight one certainly, but enough to stay my conscience."

There was truth in the words, in the tone; Mr. Treherne believed them.

"So, he has money, I suppose," was his reflection. An unsound one, Frank Lyndon was entirely dependent on his own exertions.

The evening wore on, and the gold and rose of the sunset paled to amber and beryl. Frank Lyndon felt as though he had suddenly been transported into another life than his usual feverish one, so different was the present scene to those he generally dwelt amongst.



He liked it, he liked the cool repose, the sunset hush, the whole air of restfulness and peace. He looked at the girl near him, the flow of her white dress was simple, unspoiled by dress-makers' trickeries, her manner and looks untouched by art. He could see her in the stillness of the twilight, her eyes fixed and thoughtful, her finely cut mouth pensive in its stillness.

And yet he knew that under that calm exterior there lay untold powers, not only of feeling, but of passion and imagination, which only needed the touch of the diviner's rod to bring them forth.

Mr. Treherne rose first.

"Victoire, those peaches you gave me last night still live in my memory; are there any more?"

Victoire laughed.

"Come and see," she said.

"Ah! I meant that you should bring them to me; but never mind, mother will want her nap now and the garden is as pleasant a place as any other on an evening like this. We can have a smoke there too," he added, turning to Frank.

Victoire led the way into the garden, flitting before them like a ghost in the fast gathering twilight, till she reached a wall against which was trained an enormous peach tree; she gathered two of the ripest fruit and gave them to her uncle and Frank.

"It is too dark for you to see their colour," she said to the latter, "but they are worth painting."

"And eating," said Mr. Lyndon when he had tasted his, "I don't think I ever knew what a peach was before."

---

"My only complaint against them," said Mr. Treherne meditatively, "is their excessive juiciness, one cannot bear to lose such an overflow of sweetness."

"That is like complaining that life is too pleasant," said Frank, "an unusual fault; I think a peach is almost the only object one could accuse of it."

There was a latent bitterness in his tone that jarred on Victoire.

"Life has been very pleasant to me," she said simply, forgetting the vague restlessness that had now and then beset her.

Frank did not reply, the girl thought he did not hear.

"But one of your chief sorrows in past days arose from the juiciness of peaches, Vic," said her uncle. "How often have you been scolded for staining your frock with them?"


"One must take the price of one's pleasures," said Victoire gaily.

Her words found a bitter echo in Frank Lyndon's heart, they rang in his ears then and many a day after. She spoke in jest, he knew what she said was only too sternly true.

"Women are not always so ready to take the consequences of their own actions," said Mr. Treherne. "If you hadn't been superior to the run of your sex, you would have thrown the blame on Raymond."

"Who the deuce was Raymond?" Frank wondered to himself.

"Raymond!" Victoire shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly, it was a trick she had inherited from her French mother. "Why! Raymond always lectured me worse than grandmamma and nurse together."



---

"But even he couldn't eat a peach without spilling the juice," hazarded Frank, who felt rather spiteful towards this unknown Raymond.

"He didn't eat peaches," said Victoire quaintly, "he liked apples better."

"Very bad taste," said Mr. Treherne, helping himself to another peach.

"He never had good taste." Victoire replied. "He always preferred dahlias to roses, and what do you think he sent me on my last birthday?"

"I don't know; Euclid bound in morocco, and with gilt edges, perhaps."

"No," said his niece seriously, "he gave me Euclid five years ago, when I was thirteen."

"What an awful prig," thought Frank. "Is he her brother, I wonder? Mrs. Cornish didn't mention her having one."

"This year," continued Miss Treherne.

"He sent me six pairs of gloves."

"A very nice present," said her uncle.

"The useful and ornamental combined."

"Indeed it wasn't."

"Why! what was the fault? did he send seven and a quarter, or one buttoned, or what?"


"Much worse," said Victoire, "they were all dark green or purple."

"Well, that was trying I admit," answered Mr. Treherne, "what did you do with them?"

"They are in my glove box now, I can't wear them; but it was kind of him to think of me, I ought not to laugh," she added rather penitently.

At this moment the coachman appeared coming along the turf walk.

"I beg your pardon, Sir," he said to



---

Mr. Treherne, "but something is the matter with 'Jessie,'" (Mrs. Treherne's one carriage horse), "and I want to know if you will come and look at her."

"All right," Mr. Treherne answered. "I'll be back as soon as I can," he added, turning to Frank. "If you have had enough peaches I should recommend the apricots, they are a little further along the walk."

Mr. Lyndon hardly seemed to hear the advice, though he nodded and said, "Thanks." When Mr. Treherne had disappeared, Frank drew a book from his pocket and handed it to Victoire.

"Your property, Miss Treherne," he said, and it was not so dark but that Victoire saw his smile.

"Oh! thank you," she said, "I was so afraid I had lost it," with an inward



---


appreciation of his thoughtfulness in not returning it before her uncle and grandmother.

"You were studying Victoria Corrombona?" he said inquiringly.

"Yes," she replied, then hesitatingly: "But I cannot do it, I do not know how."

"I am glad you do not," he said quickly. "You are too young for the part." "And too pure," he added to himself, he had wondered at this girl's choice of reading, he wondered still more that it had seemed to do her no harm.

Hare said once that Juliet's flow of feeling was a proof of her purity, and Frank saw from Victoire's entire calmness, that she had not the least idea that in reading the Elizabethan dramatists, she had done anything the code of society,



---

as applied to young ladies, would forbid.

"You are fond of acting?" he said inquiringly.

"Fond!"

The one word was enough. How much of the girl's passionate dramatic instinct was due to its being the one outlet in her quiet life through which the larger faculties of her fast developing nature could find utterance, how much was real genius, need not here be discussed. It would be curious to ascertain how many great or true actresses have missed their vocation from their social position, and their lacking the resolution to break through its trammels, as well as through those stronger ones of affection, which implored them not to lose, as it believed, all caste in this world, and all hope of any position in the next.

"When were you first stage struck?" asked Frank.

"I know you think me very foolish," she answered, with a flash of defiance. "I daresay I am."

He answered very gently.

"You are wrong. I know a little more of the actual stage than you do, who have spent all your life here, but that is all. If you think it was not honest interest that made me ask the question, I am sorry, for indeed I was in earnest."

What was it in his look that shot a keen thrill through her as she faltered?

"I beg your pardon."

"Then, will you answer my question? unless you think it impertinent."

"Oh no! but I hardly know how to; I think I have acted all my life."

"An odd confession for a woman,"



thought Frank, "less true; in this case, than in many others though I fancy." "I am curious though," he said aloud, "to know what induced you to study so methodically as you seem to have done."

"I think it was my finding some old theatrical memoir books in the library, Bernard's 'Retrospection,' and Kelly's 'Reminiscences,' and Campbell's 'Life of Mrs. Siddons' they taught me. But before that, when I was a child, I was very much alone, and had to invent games that were only acting really."

She had forgotten her shyness, and talked frankly and easily.

"Can't you tell me of these games?"

"If you will not think me only fit for Bedlam. I have been a Russian lady flying with her child, (my wax doll), to avoid exile in Siberia for two or three

days together. My doll always came in, I was very fond of playing Mary of Guise, and the doll was Mary Queen of Scots."

"There could hardly have been much incident in that game."

"Indeed there was, I was terribly worried by state cares, and there was a bold Baron who loved me and wanted to take the troubles off my shoulders."

"Or add to them; who played the Baron?"

"Oh! he was imaginary; I had to speak for him, and the doll, and myself. I did try to make Raymond play once, but he said it was 'rot.'"

"Who is Raymond? your brother? I have heard you speak of him before."

"No, he is my cousin, my only one except Uncle George's three little things,

who don't count, as the eldest, Charlie, is only eleven, and I see them very seldom. Raymond is so clever, we are very proud of him, and he has been better I think than most brothers would have been."

"Though he did term your amusement rot."

"Ah! that was only because he was cleverer than I. It is just the same now; he says he finds real life quite sufficient, and I like to dream; but then his life is more amusing than mine and worth more, he can work and I can do nothing."

Her face was rather sad as she spoke the last words.

"There are many," said Frank, half gaily, half bitterly, "who would be glad of the leisure you complain of."

"Yes, leisure, but I don't think anybody can be glad of idleness."

Frank shrugged his shoulders, he could have contradicted the assertion.

"I am afraid though," said Victoire, "that my wish to work for myself may be only the result of life being just a little sleepy here."

"Disillusioned again," thought Frank. "All women are the same, I thought this girl was different, and she is sighing for excitement like the rest."

He was cruelly unjust, if he had lived through fifteen years at Polwhyn, he would have better understood the girl's vague desire to take a more active and earnest part in the world.

"Do you want a London season?" he asked abruptly.

---

"Oh! no, not that, though I should like it," she added honestly.

"You told me half an hour ago that your life was very pleasant."

"So it is. It is only now and then that I think variety is charming, and acting helps one then; one is someone else and leads another life. I wonder Mr. Lyndon, why imaginary things, even their griefs and sorrows, are so fascinating."

"I suppose because they are utterly unlike real life, with its great and small worries."

The fast gathering darkness prevented Victoire seeing the expression of her companion's eyes as he spoke, but if she had, she would not have understood. It was as though the memory of some trouble, kept close but not forgotten, rose in his mind.



For this one moment it stood and fronted him, the stern shadow of a sterner reality; he turned his eyes from it and tried to forget, or rather to ignore its presence and its existence. It would have been too hard a struggle to Frank Lyndon to take the facts of his life like a man, look at them bravely, and bear their worst, and yet it would have been happier and better not only for others but for himself if he would have done so; in a dull semi-acquiescent manner he could not rouse himself to fight it.

"It is growing dark," said Victoire at length. "Shall we go in?"

"If you will," he answered. "Are you afraid of catching cold?"

Victoire's laugh, clear and low, gladdened the sweet night air.

"I never catch cold, certainly not on such an evening as this, but I think grandmamma must be awake by now."

They turned their steps towards the house.

"Look at the west," said Miss Treherne. "Though it is quite dark here, the sky is light over there still."

"It is very beautiful, that pale, tender green with those dark streaks and dashes of cloud still tinged with the after-light."

"Like a clear sea, with rocky islands scattered about it. It reminds one of Atlantis or dreamland, and the new moon might be a thin pearl boat sailing——"

"Sailing where?"

"Towards the islands; no, beyond them

there must be fairer lands hidden further, if one could but see them."

"I should not seek them," answered Frank, falling in with her humour. "I should rest contented on that long island; see, that one which looks as if it had dark groves of trees on its banks with their tops touched with gold. It was the last that caught the sunlight, I will choose that for my kingdom."

"You would not if you had a promise of something better."

"Indeed I should, mine is a lotus eating nature, or to speak more prosaically, leaves well alone."

Victoire shook her head.

"I would not. It would be wretched not to have gained the best possible."

"There are very few who do, hardly any."

"I don't think we can know that—in this world."

A half-smile for a moment trembled on his mouth, as he thought what a very different man he must appear to this girl, to the Frank Lyndon he and the world knew, and yet the simple gravity of her words awed him, her tone was so earnest and tender; her truth and innocence formed a wall round which he could not and did not wish to break. He could not have flirted with her, for there must be two to play at that game, and Victoire was entirely ignorant of it.

It was impossible to flirt with her, but it might be very easy to fall in love.

Frank Lyndon did not think himself in the least danger of committing such a folly as the latter proceeding; still it was

very pleasant to talk to her and draw her out.

There is a certain fable *à propos* of the boys and the frogs, there is a proverb bearing on the handling of edged tools, and anent the last it might be as well for men to bear in mind that while they are men they are never secure against love—the safer they think themselves, the greater perhaps their danger, and a man of twenty-nine who fancies his heart is thoroughly worn out, may find to his own cost that he has made a great mistake.

But such reflections as these were very far from Frank's mind, as in answer to a question of Mrs. Treherne's, he informed her he meant to stay at Polwhyn at least a fortnight.

"You must come up and see us often

while you are here for your grandmother's sake ; I am sorry George goes to-morrow, but your society will be a boon, if you can stand our dullness."

Whatever thoughts Frank had, there was real heartiness in his tone as he answered,

"If you will let me come now and then it will be a great kindness ; I shall not trouble you much as I have some work, study which I must accomplish, and I thought Polwhyn seemed a quiet place to manage it in."

"So it is," put in Mrs. Treherne.

"I thought it almost too much so yesterday, the hope of any society besides that of Mrs. Cornish is a pleasant surprise."

"No rudeness about Mrs. Cornish," said George Treherne from his armchair, "she

is a particular friend of mine, I consider Cornish one of the most enviable of men."

"If Julia could hear you," ejaculated his mother.

"Julia is a sensible woman and knows how I rate Mrs. Cornish's perfections, I say again I consider Cornish a man to be envied."

"If she cooks him steaks as she did mine for breakfast this morning, he certainly is," rejoined Frank.

"So your only idea of a wife is one who will cook your steaks for you, Mr. Lyndon," said Mrs. Treherne

"And a very good idea too," said her son. "If women would only devote themselves to their proper mission of making things generally comfortable for us! Well, Victoire, why don't you fire up?"

"Because I know you want me to."

"Quite right, Victoire," said her grandmother. "If Raymond were here he would fight our battle for us. He is in that pugnacious state about women's rights, that I believe if he had his will, in spite of my faint protests that I don't want to be righted, he would make me, as Tony Lumpkin said Mr. Hardcastle's mother and aunt would be represented as, an alderman and a justice of the peace."

"And Victoire a lieutenant in the militia," said her uncle, "I'll pay for your uniform, Vic. You are not not going, Mr. Lyndon, yet?"

"It is half-past ten," said Frank, who had risen. "Good night."

When Mr. Lyndon arrived at his inn he



ordered a brandy and soda, filled his meerschäum, and drawing his chair to the light, devoted himself to study.

The volume he was intent on was not of a very alarming size, it was a small book, apparently a pamphlet, in a wrapper of plain blue paper, on which the title was scribbled in ink.

Nevertheless it seemed to occupy all his attention, for when he at last rose from his chair and stretched himself, the church clock struck out one, through the night stillness.

"That's enough for to-night," soliloquized the young man. "By Jove! how tired I am, I wonder why I always am cast for parts in which I have got one wife and want to rid myself of her, so as to marry another; this is the fifth I've

---

had this year, I shall tell Symons I won't stand it any longer."

With which words and a yawn, he retired to rest.





## CHAPTER V.


“ Oh ! aye letters, I had letters, I am persecuted with letters, I hate letters, nobody knows how to write letters, and yet one has them, one does not know why.”

WAY OF THE WORLD, *Act I., Scene 2.*



CALM, shining morning after a stormy night, the rain-puddles glistening in the sun, the leaves fresh from the heavy showers, a gay breeze rustling amongst them.

Frank Lyndon had just finished his



breakfast; he had been staying at the 'Polwhyn Arms' more than a week, and was very well content with his quarters.

He was pondering over his morning quatum of letters, and his handsome face was moody, as after destroying all but one, he slipped that into the pocket of his shooting-coat, and walking to the window, looked out for a few minutes across the village street of low old fashioned houses and the wide landscape beyond. It is doubtful, however, whether he really was absorbed in the view, for there was little in it to warrant his exclaiming after a long steady gaze,

"Confound it!"

"There," was his inner reflection, "it's of no use worrying about it, or about anything else in life; sufficient to the

day, &c., I can't better matters by thinking, if I could——"

Thought ended there, but consciousness remained.


His eye caught sight of a woman's form advancing along the village street; he knew it well enough, and taking up a wide-awake hat which lay on a chair, he leisurely sauntered downstairs, and reached the garden-gate just as Victoire was passing it.

"Miss Treherne."

A sudden smile lit the girl's countenance, which was unusually pensive this morning, as she returned his greeting.

"What an awful day it was yesterday," was Frank's original remark.

"Drop, drop, drop, drop, like Ben Jonson's Echo."



---

"Yes, and the thunder was worse, I had an abominable headache all day from it."

"You haven't now?"

"No, one could not have a headache on such a morning as this. Are you doing *Lady Bountiful*?" he asked, looking at a basket which hung on her arm.

Victoire shook her head sadly.

"No," she said, "but Mrs. Grey of Alvern Farm has lost her baby, and I am taking some white flowers to her for the poor little thing's coffin."

She opened her basket and showed a wealth of snowy blossoms, roses, jasmine and primulas mingled with the rarer blooms of *stephanotis* and *gardenia*.

"May I have one?" he asked, with no touch of mock gallantry in his tone.

"Oh, no," she answered, earnestly and simply, "not flowers intended for the dead, it would be a bad omen."

"I will risk it, I am not superstitious."


She shook her head again.

"No," she said, "but take these."

She had a little bunch of heartsease in her waistband, she took the bouquet and offered it to him.

If she had been any other woman Frank Lyndon would have regarded the gift, and rightly, perhaps, as an incentive to flirtation, and would not have been slow to avail himself of the chance. But with this girl he, flirt as he was, thinking as lightly as bitterly of women, was reverent and tender, poor Victoire had been in no danger else.

"Thank you," he said, fastening the



purple flowers in his button-hole.  
"What are the thoughts you would give me?"

For a moment she was puzzled as to his meaning, then she answered,

"Pleasant ones, they are heartsease as well, you know."

Frank remembered another name of that deep-hued blossom, "purple with love's wound," that a few days ago would have described his feeling for Victoire, but now love in idleness had grown into passionate pansies.

"How far off is Alvern?" he said, abruptly changing the subject.

"About three miles."

"You are not going to walk all that way alone?"

"Indeed I am."

"Let me accompany you, at least."



---

No one could have guessed how pleasant the idea was to Victoire from her answer.

"Oh, no! please don't!" then seeing his face darken. "I don't mean to be rude, but it will be a trouble to you, and I have walked alone all my life."

"Won't you let me come with you?"

"If you really like to," she began, and then, looking at his face, saw something in his eyes which made her own look away from them.

He did not answer and they started; he offered to take her basket but she resisted.

"Please don't, I would rather carry it myself."

They walked on, side by side, without saying much, their acquaintance had grown infinitely since that evening that

Frank had spent at Polwhyn Manor. Mrs. Treherne, hospitable as all west country-people are, had been constant in sending down invitations to Mr. Lyndon, which he was very willing to accept for the sake of seeing Victoire.

It may seem very strange, but nevertheless it is true, that nervous as Mr. and Mrs. Treherne had been about the chance of Raymond and Victoire falling in love with each other, they neither of them saw any danger in throwing her into the companionship of a man far more fascinating than her cousin. The fact was that Mrs. Treherne and her son had both become so thoroughly possessed by the idea that the cousins cared for each other, that their eyes were blinded as to the exceeding likelihood of Victoire falling in love with Frank Lyndon.

A girl is often in danger of loving the first well-looking, well-bred man who treats her not as a child but a woman; a maiden of sixteen or seventeen who has been petted, lectured, scolded and ordered about all her life, finds an ineffable sweetness in the first recognition of her social rank as a woman, and the delicately implied homage to that feminine power which she herself hardly knows of as yet. Such treatment is different to anything she has yet met with, it attracts her accordingly.

This was the case with Victoire, and the process was a little hastened by the results of a suggestion of Frank's, which he made one day when he had been lunching at Polwhyn; Mrs. Treherne had been called from the room, and he had led Victoire to speak of her dramatic studies.

She was complaining about the difficulties of the mechanical side of acting, when he said,

"Will you let me help you?"

"How?"

"I have a little experience of—" here he hesitated—"of acting, and I think I might smooth a few of these difficulties."

He had been afraid the girl would question him further, but she did not, she only said,

"Would you? I should be very grateful, though there is no use in it," she ended with a sigh.

She took his offer so simply and naturally that the young man was a little piqued. Would nothing teach this girl how to flirt?

Frank hardly considered how much

harm he was doing, when, in teaching Victoire to render the tenderness of Rosalind and Portia, he strove to make her feel with them; and yet why did he try, for his own part, to throw such an intense personal sympathy into the love words of Orlando and Bassanio, as made the girl feel dimly how sweet life must have been to Rosalind and long half unconsciously to know love herself.

Frank's love-making by deputy, Shakespeare's heroes being his medium, was so far successful, that Victoire began to think she could enter into Rosalind's feelings, without knowing what it was within her own heart which enabled her to lend a deeper and fresher grace to Rosalind's speeches. She did not yet guess she was in love.

The two walked along the winding

road which ran between fern banks, bright with bachelors' buttons and ragged robin, and crowned with fruit-laden, warm-scented orchards; the clear rain drops still shone on the bramble leaves and long grass, while now and then the shaking of an over-hanging bough brought down a shower of diamonds on Victoire's broad hat, or Frank's shoulders.

They talked by fits and starts as they walked along, but they had already reached that point where silence is not strange and stiff, but eloquent, and now and then when Victoire found the end of a sentence fail her, she did not strive to find words, feeling Frank would understand her meaning without them.


Still when, by chance, they got on a subject that stirred her deeply, she spoke earnestly, passionately; her cheek flushed,

her eyes glowed, her whole heart was in her words, and Frank knew it.

Suddenly, in that moment, there came to him, as a revelation, the possibility of a different and better life than had been his ; the vision of what might have been, had he been strengthened and ennobled by the love of a pure and gracious woman, his lower self subdued by shame at the constant presence of a life higher than his own.

Dreams, only dreams, the future grows out of the present, as certainly as the present from the past ; what a man soweth that shall he also reap, and when Frank Lyndon bitterly rebelled against the facts of his life, he forgot they were due to his own follies and faults.

Yet surely there may be some pity felt for the man, weak, selfish, morbid though



---

he were, who, for that one moment, saw the vision of a happiness he could never know. He loved Victoire Treherne, loved her as he had never loved before; believed in her as he had never believed, or thought he could believe in woman.

He knew she could never be his—knew that in winning her innocent heart, as he felt he was, he was doing her a foul wrong, and yet was so abjectly weak, so miserably selfish, that he did not even strive to save her, or himself, from the misery which must surely come from such a love.

Why did he love her? He could not tell; he had met cleverer, lovelier, more graceful women, but not one of them had ever touched him as this girl had; till he had met her, he had thought him-



---

self thoroughly *blasé*, ready and willing to flirt with any woman, to any extent, but incapable of any higher love. He had not known himself, and so great was the new pleasure Victoire's untarnished loveliness had awakened in him, that he would enjoy it reckless, as was said before, of the cost to either her, or himself.

And she, poor little girl, had lived for the last week in a dream of happiness, the cause of which she did not understand; she thought the change was in herself, that she was beginning to take life more healthily.

"Raymond was right," she said to herself, "in telling me actual life was enough, and I should find it so, if I tried. I don't want any different life to what I have now, and yet things are the

---

same as when I wrote him that foolish discontented letter. Well! he will be glad to know I am growing wiser."

A very questionable supposition that, allowing that Mr. Marchant were made aware of other facts connected with the brighter tone of Victoire's thoughts; no letters had passed between Polwhyn Manor and St. Alban's Court since Mr. Lyndon had taken up his abode at the 'Polwhyn Arms.' Raymond was on a walking tour in Normandy, and so knew nothing of Victoire's new acquaintance.

Mrs. Treherne liked Frank better the more she saw of him; in truth, it was not so much his own qualities, or graces, as those of his grandfather that she invested him with, that won her heart, and it is to be feared her imaginary Frank

was very different to the real one, as unlike indeed, as was Victoire's ideal of him.

In due time they reached Alvern Farm, a low, one-storied, grey stone house built against the side of a green slope of hill, with the out-buildings and farmyard running out at one side, and a wide garden in front filled with tree fuschias, scarlet geranium, and huge bushes of lavender and hydrangea, pink and blue.

Victoire pushed open the garden gate, and walked up the path followed by Frank.

"Wait here for me, will you?" she said to him, as she knocked at the door of the house, which was opened by a girl whose face showed small grief, only passive bewilderment. Victoire entered, and Mr.

Lyndon was left to pace up and down the garden.

Five minutes passed, and Frank began to be a little impatient, he turned round the side of the house and found himself in an old fashioned, turf-walked kitchen garden, with a large pear tree trained primly against the side of the house.

Some shadow of a white dress within one of the diamond-cased windows made him draw nearer, and himself concealed from view, he saw within a room white, clean and chill, with the coldness of death, on the white-draped bed lay the dead baby, and by its side stood Victoire, she had laid her flowers on the child's still breast and in its cold tiny hands, and now she paused with a handful of creamy blossoms, as though thinking where to place them, when a low cry

made her turn round, a cry which seemed torn from the lips of a crouching figure at the foot of the bed, the baby's mother.

The flowers dropped unheeded, Victoire was kneeling by the other woman's side, clasping her in her arms, sobbing with her, all differences of rank forgotten, only their common womanhood remembered.

Frank turned away from the window with a sudden pang at his heart of fierce longing, unavailing desire. He walked to the low stone wall and looked away to the west, at the long, swelling cornfields and orchards, the wild, rocky moorland beyond, and the far off, thin, shining line of steel blue sea.

Till now he had fancied himself strong, in this moment he knew the truth—he

was contemptibly weak, cowardly, unmanly.

He pushed the knowledge aside, he would not face it, and when Victoire came out from the house he was himself again.

The traces of tears were yet in the girl's eyes, her mouth was lovely in thoughtfulness. Frank looked at her with a certain reverence, recognising how far he yet was from fully knowing the fairness of her nature.

They walked home silently, as they parted she gave him her hand, he held it as he said.

"I may come up to-morrow for our lesson."

"Of course, if you like."

Then they separated and Frank, entering his room threw himself into a chair ;

he took out the letter he had received that morning, and frowned as he re-read it; then with a sudden fierce passion, clenched it in his hand and tore it to atoms.

"Damn her!" he said, "damn her!"

The letter so maltreated had been innocent enough, but with one short sentence in it which stabbed, as the writer, an intimate acquaintance of Frank's, had meant it should.

"La belle St. Claire is as fascinating as ever in 'Little Rhoderick Dhu, or the Heart that was in the Highlands, the gallant Scots Greys and the little Dear,' to quote the title at full length. Her dress, or rather her want of it, is the talk of the town; Sir Beattie Wybrow is said to be awfully sweet on her, but I

---

am afraid, my dear fellow, there is no chance for you, the lady knows what's what, and will keep on the right side of the hedge."

"If it were fifty years ago I could shoot the fellow for his cursed impertinence," meditated Frank, "as it is——"

He drew a travelling desk towards him and wrote,

"Dear Jack,

"Your letter was welcome, insomuch as it apprised me that the light of British comedy the one man who in these days of burlesque and sensation upholds, &c., &c., (for further particulars see papers,) is still existing, and hath not rendered up his life to the monsters hated by gods and men, or been forced like old Iron-



stone to immure himself against their attacks, both by day and night, within the friendly walls of the temple of the drama; by the way, how is the old fellow? Five times this year, in five different pieces, have I wronged his domestic happiness and heard him declaim about the sanctity of the Englishman's hearth.

"I have lazed very pleasantly about in this place for the last fortnight, and as a change, it is more refreshing than a deadly lively watering-place, where you are recognized and followed by the British snobocracy, your appearance freely discussed in your own hearing, and your vanity flattered by two young ladies loudly speculating as to whether you wear a wig, and their certainty that you 'make up.'

---

"Here there is hardly a soul to speak to, but excellent fishing, and my quarters are A 1, an old fashioned inn, which would be a fortune to Beverley to paint, and ale that is a revelation; and it's more cheerful than wandering about Alpine glaciers after thy fashion, Oh! friend Jack, for though a broken leg is a good advertisement, it must be awkward to feel a crick when one kneels in frenzied passion. No, since your misadventure last year I have kept clear of Switzerland.

"You say a certain lady has made a hit at the Phœbus, so she may, I don't care a hang what she does; but when I saw her last on the stage it struck me that she is getting scraggy, and her figure not what it was. Thine,

"F. LYNDON."

If ever words hurt the one who wrote them, those last careless words of Frank Lyndon's letter were an agony to him, an agony of pride crushed into shame. But none should suspect it, and so he wrote, outraging his manhood in so doing.

He folded his letter, addressed it "J. Ryan, Esq., Greenroom Club, Adelphi," went out, and posted it himself.





## CHAPTER VI.

"A circulating library is an evergreen-tree of diabolical knowledge."—RIVALS.

"UR last afternoon."

"Yes."

Neither seemed inclined to say more; it was a day in early September, and Mr. Lyndon was leaving Polwhyn on the morrow, the prospect did not seem to raise either his or Victoire's spirits.

He had come up to the Manor at about

one o'clock and found Victoire lazily enjoying herself, rocking slowly to and fro in the swing which hung under the shadow of a large tulip tree on the lawn. She had thrown her broad hat aside, and the wind had ruffled her dark hair, a volume of Shelley, one of the treasures she had unearthed from the library, a first edition copy of the "Prometheus," was in her hand.

She sprang up as she saw Frank advancing across the lawn, and after they had greeted, said,

"Grandmamma told me she had asked you to lunch; will you give me a lesson afterwards, it will be our last?"

Then it was he said, "Our last afternoon."

The girl did not tell him how that very morning she had been wondering

what Polwhyn would be when he had gone, she dimly felt it could never be the same as before he had come, but where would the difference lie.

The luncheon bell called them into the house; Mrs. Treherne was already in the cedar parlour, and expressed her regret at his departure.

"I have had a long holiday," he answered, laughing.

"I hope we shall see you again," she said, "but one experience of Polwhyn dullness is enough for most people."

"Is it?" said Frank, "then I am not one of them; I shall turn up again. There are only two characters I am compared to, the proverbial bad shilling and the rolling stone that never by any chance gathers moss."

"I don't believe you against yourself,

but I am afraid your words are only too true about the young men of the present day. If children are parents' crowns still, they are very thorny ones."

"Oh! grandmamma, Raymond——"

"Raymond is a very exceptional boy, I leave him out of the question, and I have not much fault to find with you." It was part of Mrs. Treherne's stately old fashioned creed of manners never to find fault with children or servants before strangers. "You are a good girl enough," here Frank shot a swift glance of amusement across at Victoire, "but though I don't see much of the world nowadays, from all I do see and hear, and from all I read in those trashy novels sometimes published, things have changed, and not for the better. There is reason in the command not to inquire

---

---

why the old times were better than the new, and good reason; for if we once began to do so, the puzzle would take up so much time we should have none for anything else."

"Do you think times are so very bad, Mrs. Treherne?"

"What else can I think? Look at the novels of my day and those of yours. Miss Austen and Sir Walter against Ouida and Guy Livingstone."

Frank deferentially hinted at the existence of George Eliot and other honoured names, he likewise put in the claims of Dickens and Thackeray.


"Thackeray belongs to my time more than to yours, you must have been in knickerbockers when he died, so does Dickens, though I can't bear him; I never would let Victoire read 'Oliver



'Twist,' I wouldn't send her among such company as is described there, why should I let her read about it?"

A recollection of the very queer company Victoire must have often found herself among in the course of her researches into the British Drama, caused Frank to bend his head down over his plate to avoid Mrs. Treherne's seeing his amused smile.

"You may think it is only an old woman's nonsense," pursued Mrs. Treherne, "but they say books reflect the tone of the time, and if so, when I was a girl my ideal of love was that Joanna Baillie's 'Basil and Victoria,' or Wordsworth's 'Laodamia,' and there was no lack of warmth or strength in them, as it is the fashion now to say there is in



Miss Austen ; but as to the nauseous rubbish that is written now, faugh !"

It is impossible to do justice to the disgust of Mrs. Treherne's ejaculation, it was supreme and unqualified.

"But we have some writers still," said Frank, "who do not offend in the way you speak of."

"They are the exceptions not the rule," said the old lady with decision that forbade a reply, "and which of the two classes do young people prefer ?"

Frank was rather at a loss for an answer.

"The whole tone of the books," continued Mrs. Treherne, "the slang, the bad English, the scraps of every language under the sun, quoted without rhyme or reason, except to show off the author's learning. Then the padding, the long

pages about nothing at all, which the reviews speak of as 'vivid freshness of description,' 'passionate interpretation of nature,' or whatever may be the last new jargon of 'art criticism.' Art criticism, indeed! give me an essay of Macaulay's; ah, what mincemeat he would have made of this new school of novel writing!"

Frank laughed, he could not help it, and Victoire's smile danced over her face; Mrs. Treherne, however, was not offended.

"It is true," she said, "all I have said, and as to the morals of modern novels, they are enough to spoil any girl or man either. Why, in the very last I read—"

"You do read them then, Mrs. Treherne?"

"At my age one only reads to be amused, they serve that purpose well

---

enough I own, and their faults can hardly hurt me."

"I beg your pardon. Well, you were saying in the last you read."

"Oh yes; in that, and it was a very mild specimen of its class, the heroine scraped up an acquaintance with a stranger, actually spoke to a man who had never been introduced to her."


This awful climax put Mr. Lyndon in a far more difficult position than the recital of even more heinous conduct on the part of the erring damsel referred to could have done; he might have laughed against his will, had he not seen Victoire's face opposite, cold, stern, wretched from the wound that had been inflicted on her soft maidenly pride, but that sight pricked him to the heart and he rushed to her rescue.

"I do not think I should have felt it so," he said in answer to Mrs. Treherne's query, as to what respect a man would hold a girl in who committed such an offence, "but some women are different from others, a man can always tell."

This lucid reply did not please Mrs. Treherne, she drew herself up slightly as she answered, "I should not have thought that even in these days, men would approve of women who have no proper dignity."

"Nor should I," answered Frank in a tone of sharp pain, "we have not degenerated as far as that," he added with a bitter laugh.

Victoire sat quite still, her eyes cast down, her whole soul filled with a tumult of shame and self-reproach. Had she lowered herself in Mr. Lyndon's eyes?



Did he think lightly of her? The idea was too hard to bear.

"Why did you never tell me it would not be nice to do so, grandmamma?" she said at last, and the quaint simplicity of her words would have pleaded eloquently for her, had she needed a defence.

"Why should I, when I knew there was never any danger of your doing such a thing. I detest the fashion nowadays of telling girls everything they ought or ought not to do. When they need to know, the world will teach them soon enough, and if they do get a few rubs it won't hurt them."

"But they might do things that were wrong without knowing it."

"Not at all unlikely," thought Frank.

"There is very little chance of that, a

right-minded woman's instinct will teach her the proper course."

"Then I am not right-minded," was on Victoire's lips, but she did not say it, she felt ashamed and miserable. The far off tingle of the door bell was heard.

"Mrs. Onslow, ma'am, in the drawing-room."

"Victoire, dear, go and ask Mrs. Onslow to come in here and have some lunch, she must have been on one of her long visiting walks."

Victoire disappeared, and Mrs. Treherne continued.

"I don't think anything so destroys a girl's mind as that dreadful self-consciousness so many have."

"But how can you prevent it?"

"By very simple means, not allowing anything to awaken it, I am sure that

---

that constant inquiry as to the condition of one's mind is bad for either man or woman."

"I can't say myself," said Frank, "I have never tried it."

"Don't then, it always makes people disagreeable and self-engrossed. I have never let Victoire read modern novels unless I have read them first, because of the heroines' way of poking and prying into their 'inner selves,' as the authors say, like Guy Fawkes with a dark lantern."

"Do you think they run the same danger?"

"Yes, I think a good many mental conflagrations are the result of the habit."

Frank smiled to himself, but he did not answer, and Victoire returning with



---

Mrs. Onslow, the rectoress of Polwhyn, a fresh, hale, middle-aged lady, with a pleasant expression of cheerfulness and common sense, the conversation took a different turn.

"Now, Mrs. Onslow," said Mrs. Treherne, when the former lady had finished her lunch, "I know you have some business to talk to me about."

Mrs. Onslow laughed.

"Yes, John asked me to come up and ask you about Grey's Farm; you know young Bolitho is going to be married, and his father wants to lease the Horn Farm to him, but the rent——"

"I see you want to soften my heart, I don't know what George would say to you. Well, come into the drawing-room and we will talk about it there."

"Oh! and could you give me a little

fruit, poor Mary Grant longs for it so."

"Victoire shall get it ready for you by the time you go. Mr. Lyndon, Mrs. Onslow and I are going to talk business, so I shall turn you over to Victoire and croquet."

Frank rose to open the door for the two ladies; when they were gone, he turned to speak to Victoire, but she was leaning against the window, her face averted from him. He was thinking what to say when she suddenly turned round,

"Was what grandmamma said true?"

The sad, pleading ring of her voice touched him.

"You are not still thinking of that?" he began hastily.

"Has it made you think badly of me? I never knew it was wrong."

The smarting tears she would not let

fall stung her eyes as she spoke, Frank saw them.

"There was nothing wrong," he said impetuously. "I was impertinent, but you—oh ! you don't know what I thought then, what I think now."

He suddenly stopped. What would he have said ?

The smile came back to Victoire's face as she answered.

"Think what you like, except that I am unladylike and bad mannered."

They both laughed.

"I am in small danger of doing so," he answered. Something in his voice sent a keen delicious thrill through Victoire, and with it a sudden impulse of fear lest he should say more, a girl's involuntary repulsion of the first love words she has ever heard.

"Come and have some croquet," she said hurriedly.

His face grew moody, but he followed her to the lawn.

"I forgot though," she said, seeing his expression, "you don't like croquet."

"I like what pleases you."

"It doesn't please me, I am tired of it; what shall we do?"

"You proposed a lesson."

"I don't think I could learn to-day, would you read to me, I have this dreadful frock to finish for Mrs. Onslow's little girl."

"Practice of the domestic virtues," observed Frank, lazily.

"Like Becky Sharp's frock for her dear, little boy."

"What shall I read?" he asked abruptly.

"Anything, I don't care."

"But I do," he answered, "I won't be stuck down to 'Childe Harold' or 'Friends in Council.'"

He had seen both of these books at the Manor, with "Victoire Treherne from her affectionate cousin, R. Marchant" written on the fly leaves.

"Christabel."

"No, I can't stand it."

The irritable almost pettish tone struck her with astonishment.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "for being such a bear, but I have a headache."

"Then don't read."

"Yes, I shall, if you will tell me what you like."

"Wait a moment."

She ran back to the house; he followed

---

her into the cedar parlour, and as they stood by the book case, laid his hand on a volume of Elizabeth Browning.

" Will this do ?"

She nodded assent, and they returned to the house.





## CHAPTER VII.

“ Les hommes s'épargneraient la plus grande partie des peines qu'ils se donnent pour nous en imposer, s'ils pouvaient imaginer combien la noblesse de nos idées leur donne de facilité pour nous tromper, une femme croirait se dégrader en supposant des vices à l'objet qu'elle a choisi pour celui de ces affections, et dès qu'elle aime, elle accorde plus de vertus à son amant qu'il n'ose en feindre.

MARQUIS DE CRESSY.



ICTOIRE took possession of her favourite seat, the low swing, while Frank rejecting the garden chair she proffered, threw himself on the

ground near her feet and opened the book.

He turned the pages till he found "The Rhyme of the Duchess May," he read it without comment or interruption, only now and then glancing at Victoire to see its effect.

She said nothing when at the end of the words,

"Then back-toppling, crashing back a dead weight  
flung out to wrack,  
Horse and riders over fell,"

he stopped, but he observed that her work was not much further advanced than when he began to read.

He read again this time "Caterina to Camoens."

The passionate love poetry of those verses needs little aid of voice, yet it



seemed to Victoire as though never till this moment had she known their meaning. His voice naturally perfect in its tone, trained to tell every word's full expression, pleaded through the Portuguese girl's love and sorrow, lending and giving pathos.

"But—but now—yet unremoved  
Up to Heaven, they glisten fast  
You may cast away, beloved  
In your future all my past :  
Such old phrases  
May be praises  
For some fairer bosom queen,  
Sweetest eyes were ever seen."

The tears were gathering in Victoire's eyes, her lips trembled, her work fell from her hand, she had forgotten her self; she only remembered Caterina and Frank.

If it had been his purpose to render her sensitive to love, he could have found nothing more likely to move the dawning womanhood within her than the reading of that sad, tender, passionate poem, it touched into life the slumbering love which had grown within her heart; her life had come to her, though she did not know it.

"Victoire, you are crying."

Her Christian name had slipped from him unawares, but neither of them noticed it.

"No, I am not," she said decidedly, as two drops rolled down her cheeks.

"Why do you read such things?"

"I won't read any more if it has such an effect, your work isn't half done."

"I shan't do any more to-day, I'm

lazy and naughty, and I mean to be so."

"Hurrah for freedom!" said Frank, as Victoire tossed her work aside. "*Vive la République!* Your one fault is that you are never idle, I should have a fellow-feeling with you if you were lazy now and then."

"You are more polite than Raymond is, he is always scolding me for being unmethodical."

"Hang Raymond!" thought Frank, but he contented himself by saying, "I am certain your cousin and I shouldn't get on."

"I am sure you wouldn't," said Victoire so energetically, that they both laughed.

They had risen, and were strolling across the lawn towards the orchard gate,

as Victoire spoke, they reached it, and Frank lifting the latch, held it open for her to pass through.

It was an old world orchard, the grass lush, soft and deep, and the trees heavily laden with fragrant, sweet apples, such as Cowley commended for their "winier juice," sparkling and scented to the taste; the boughs were gnarled, twisted, moss-grown and lichen frosted, and down at the end of the close the Riggan flowed between banks thick with bulrushes and meadow-sweet.

"I don't know how I shall feel to-morrow," said Frank, "when I see Polwhyn vanishing in the distance."

"Rather cheerful, I should think," said Victoire, but her face belied her words.

"Do you think so? don't you know I leave my life behind me?"

Victoire did not answer.

"Have you nothing to say to me, Victoire?"

"What do you want me to say?" she asked, with that strange feeling of wishing yet dreading his answer. "You know we are sorry you are going."

"We! say I, Victoire, Victoire, why are you so cruel, you know I love you."

Over her fair face swept a lovely colour like the first rose hue of dawn, her eyes were strange with the wondering awe and joy of one new born into a beautiful world.

"You love me," she repeated slowly, then the strangeness lost itself in a sense of utter happiness. "Oh! are you in earnest?"

"In earnest! I want an answer, child; do you love me?"

"I don't know," then as she saw the moody look she knew cross his face. "Oh! yes, I do, this must be love though it is different to what I thought."

"What is it, dear?"

That first caressing word, the tender tone thrilled through her.

"I can't think," then brokenly. "It all seems so strange, but you—you—you love me."

He drew her closer to him, holding her hands in his, looking in her eyes, and as she spoke their lips met.

Then, with a sudden impulse, she drew back ashamed and trembling.

"Don't," she said, "don't."

"My darling! my Victoire! you are not frightened of me?"

"No," she answered; "why should I be? But I don't understand, it is so strange, I never knew what love was before."

"Do you now?"

"I think so," then there was a long silence, "but I wonder why you love me."

"Because you are the sweetest woman on earth, Victoire, my own!"

"Because you are very foolish," she answered.

"In all things except loving you; you must teach me to be wiser and better, my sweet."

"No," she answered, half laughing, half earnest, "I must learn of you, you are older, and the husband must teach the wife."

"The wife!" Her words called him



back to his better self, such as it was; he had been a villain, base and treacherous, and in spite of his habit of self-deception, for that instant he despised himself.

"I can teach you nothing," he said, with a sigh that was half a groan. "Only, child, whatever faults I have, believe I love you."

"I couldn't doubt it unless I doubted you, and I trust you with all."

Frank turned away, her words were so infinitely sweet and yet so terrible to him; he was weak both for good and evil, and it is doubtful which gave him the most pain, the thought of the sorrow this girl's love for him must surely bring upon her, or the knowledge that this gracious creature must hate and despise him when she learned the truth.



He did not know Victoire yet, nor what the love of such a girl could be, he would learn it through bitter sorrow.

"Are you going away to-morrow now?" she said, looking at him with a shy fondness that made her lovelier than ever.

"I must."

"You will write? I shall not be happy unless I hear from you, oh! so often."

They walked on in silence, his heart throbbing thickly as he tried to speak the words that would not come.

"Victoire," he said at last, stopping suddenly, "I have deceived you; there is an obstacle between us."

What it had cost him to say that none but himself could know; he had sum-

---

moned up all his strength, and thought himself firm, but Victoire's answer shattered his resolution.

"An obstacle! what?" and her eyes looked fully at him wonderingly. "You love me."

"Love you, dear, better than I ever thought I could love; best, oh most best. Don't torture me by such a doubt."

The girl's simplicity prevented her dreaming of the real barrier between them, and she answered,

"Then nothing can separate us; but tell me what you spoke of, you don't think I care for anything but you. If you are like the men in novels who declare they have nothing, you know that makes no difference," and she blushed.

---

Frank smiled rather sadly at her words.

"Suppose, only suppose, I had been wild, reckless, sinful."

If he had said weak, unmanly, selfish, it would have been truer but would not have sounded as well.

"You never could have been, but if you had been I couldn't help loving you; I know now I loved you from the first moment I saw you in the wood; it seems as if I had waited for you and known of you all my life, and it is only really a month—how strange! how beautiful!"

Then Frank Lyndon's better angel left him; he could not bear the thought of witnessing this girl's pain if he told her the truth, or the shame and self-reproach that must be his lot, he could not sever

the bond between himself and that sweet purity.

"I will tell you, Victoire; Mrs. Treherne must not know of our——" he paused as at a loss for a word, "of our engagement."

"Grandmamma, why not?"

"She would not consent to it."

"Why?"

The tone of utter surprise hurt him so, that he answered almost fiercely,

"Because I am an actor; there, you know it now."

"An actor!" for a moment her cheeks flushed with wondering delight. "Why did you not tell us?"

"Why! Do you remember how Mrs. Treherne spoke of the—of my profession the other day? was it likely I should confess to it after that?"

"But I don't, oh! don't think;—she did not know."

"Do you think if I go to her now and ask her, she will consent to your marriage with a vagabond?" the last word came out with a little hard laugh.

Victoire's eyes flashed.

"A vagabond! you!"

"In the eyes of the law; but put it more plainly, will she let you marry an actor?"

Victoire did not answer at once.

"We can wait," she said at last.

"Yes, we must wait; but no one must know of our love, dear, but ourselves. I cannot leave this place with the knowledge you will be persecuted to give up our engagement; we must keep it secret. You see it, dearest?"

"I cannot," the words broke half sobbing from her lips.

"Cannot what?"

"Deceive her, she has always been so good, I cannot."

His face grew dark.

"And I cannot tell her, my darling, will you not do this for my sake?"

"I cannot," she repeated, and her tone was wretched. "Let me tell her, she likes you, I do think she might give way."

"My child, I tell you it is impossible. Victoire, you will grant me this one thing?"

She shook her head.

"Oh! don't tempt me! I do love you so, and it is so hard."

The cry of a girl's agony, of her first great struggle between right and wrong,

was in those pitiful words. Frank saw his advantage and tried to follow it up ; he argued, caressed, implored, but all to no purpose.

"You cannot care for me," he said at last, but repented as he saw the mute misery of her pale face.

"Not care for you," she repeated. "You know the truth, you should not pain me so."

The lack of protest, the dull sorrow of the words, touched him as nothing else could have done.

"Victoire, I have been a brute."

"No," she said ; "but why did you tell me you loved me, if this must be the end ?"

"This ! what ?"

He never forgot Victoire's face as he saw it there, day and night for long after

---

it rose before him, pale with grief, piteous in its pain, yet strong with resolve.

"Our parting."

"Victoire, you won't——"

"If you will not let me tell grand-mamma, we must say goodbye, there can be no engagement between us."

"Do you mean this?"

She did not heed him, but went on sadly,

"I cannot have a secret from her, not such a secret as this would be; she does not deserve it. We must be nothing to each other, or as we were before this afternoon, and I must forget it, or try to. I wish I could—I wish I could!"

"You cannot," he answered. "You are stifling your own heart, trying to do that which is impossible. Be as we were



before this afternoon, can we? You are all to me now, I thought I was the same to you."

"Oh! God help me," the poor child cried. "Why do you try to make me do wrong, Frank? It must be so."

It was in vain he tried to persuade her, she clung blindly to the right, as she saw it.

"Then it is all over," said Frank, at last. "I must never speak to you of love again."

"No;" the word came heavily from between her lips.

"You are very wise, I will say no more."

He turned to leave, but there broke from her lips, "Oh! don't leave me so, say good-bye to me, and forgive me."

The tears were streaming down her

---

cheeks, her hands were clenched in agony, he turned, and seeing her so, his pride and selfishness failed him.

"Forgive! Oh! Victoire, my darling, if you can forgive—Oh! the wrong I have done you!"

He covered her hands with kisses; and then, for one moment forgetting all, he pressed her lips and brow; she did not prevent nor return it, but when he released her, she stood quietly for a moment, then turned away with a low, quick sob.

"That is our good-bye," she said, a few moments after, with a sad smile.

Frank did not answer, he knew that he was deceiving her even now, that it was her own truth and honour alone that had saved her from a far worse peril than she had ever dreamed of;

and that he, the man she loved, instead of protecting her had been her tempter; no wonder he was conscience-stricken and miserable.

Victoire turned to him as they neared the house, saying,

"Don't let her see anything is the matter. To-day has only been a dream."

He bowed his head; but as they entered the porch, he caught her hand.

"Say once more, you forgive me."

She looked at him, such love in her eyes that Frank could have groaned for the thought of what might have been, and for the pity of her sorrow.

"I can't forgive," she said, "for you did not mean to hurt me."

They passed into the house, and the rest of the afternoon was curiously unreal to both. Victoire packed a basket

---

of fruit for Mrs. Onslow, and afterwards, when tea was over, sang two or three songs at Mrs. Treherne's request.

Her voice was clear and steady; as she rose from the piano, Frank put out his hand.

"Good evening," he said.

Their good-bye had been spoken earlier in the day.

"Good evening."

"Must you go so early, Mr. Lyndon?" said Mrs. Treherne.

"I am afraid so, my train leaves at some unearthly hour to-morrow morning, and it is a ten miles drive to the station."

"Can I offer you the carriage for to-morrow?"

"Thanks, very much, but I have engaged a fly. Good-bye, and very many

thanks for all your kindness." Well he had tried to recompense it, he thought to himself.

Victoire slipped away, leaving her grandmother and Frank still talking; she went to her own room, and stood by the window in the dusk of the twilight. She saw the tall, grey figure leave the house; he did not look back but strode down the hilly path towards the village, and as he was lost to the girl's sight, there came to her, as in a rush, the full sense of all she had lost.

He was gone, and the poor child knelt by her bed, praying passionately not to die; but that she might live to see his face again.



## CHAPTER VIII.

"Dost see how unregarded now  
That piece of beauty passes?  
There was a time when I did vow  
To that alone;  
But mark the fate of faces,  
The red and white works now no more on me  
Than if it could not charm, or I not see."

SUCKLING.

**T**HE rain was slashing and driving  
against the windows of the  
railway-station the next morn-  
ing when Frank Lyndon took his ticket  
for London.

---

Yesterday, September had been as warmer, richer, mellower June—to-day she was as November's first cousin, cheerless with a gusty east wind, which whirled the rain-sodden leaves from their boughs, and rendered a good fire the chief desire of life.

The train was due at six a.m., and it wanted ten minutes to that time when Frank, after a glance at the dreary waiting-room with its stove, guiltless of heat, walked out on to the wet platform, and looked up and down the line.

The landscape was hidden by the heavy autumn rain and mist, and the station was ten miles from Polwhyn, yet Frank's eyes turned to the direction in which Victoire's home must be.


Why had he not urged her more vehemently, if he had, she must have yielded ;

he had been tame and weak in his entreaties, had desisted too soon.

The passionate longing to see her again seemed as though it would consume him in its intensity. In her presence, the thought of the cruel harm her love would work her had tempered his words; he could not look at her face, bright with her faith in him, and not feel the shame of deceiving such trust; but apart from her, from the charm of her pure rectitude, he only thought of himself and his own gratification.

What the consequences would have been, if Victoire had consented to his wish of a secret engagement, was a question Frank Lyndon did not ask himself, far less try to answer.


The long, curving line of the train was dimly seen in the distance, the snort-





ing, panting engine ground more slowly along the rails till it stopped; Frank leisurely sought an empty first-class carriage, he was in no mood for companionship, and as both the smoking compartments were occupied he did not enter them.

A whistle, a scream, the doors were banged, the train moved out of the station, and Frank had left Polwhyn and its neighbourhood; was that chapter of his life finished, he vaguely wondered to himself? He had gone to Polwhyn, intending to stay there two days, he had remained there over a month. Would it have been better, he thought, if he had never heard that fresh, impassioned voice in the wood, had never seen the slim, grey-eyed girl he had taught to act and love?



Then he rolled a cigarette, lit it, spread his railway rug over his knees, and opened 'The World.'

"Exeter!" He had exhausted his supply of papers, and the contents of his flask, both needed replenishing, and he jumped out in search of the refreshment-room and book-stall.

The second bell rang, and as he hurried back to the train, he was annoyed to find there was a lady in his compartment. Well! there was no help for it now, and at most times Frank Lyndon would by no means have objected to the company of a pretty woman; he sprang in, and as he did so dropped the paper he had bought, the train was already moving, but a news-boy picking it up, held it to Frank who caught it, and tossed the boy a penny as the carriage neared the end

of the platform; not till then did he turn round and face his travelling companion.

He started, but did not speak, she had the advantage over him in having recognised him half a minute before, and showed no surprise, but gave him a half-smiling little nod.

She was young, about five-and-twenty, but looked less, and pretty—so pretty that even the thin line of black under the large, dewy, blue eyes, the fixed though faint rose hue could not spoil the charm of a short, oval face with the charming nose, pretty mouth and low forehead, fringed with fair hair teased into a shining mist which were the personal attractions of the young lady known to the public as Miss Nellie St. Claire.

"Aren't you going to speak to me,

Frank?" she inquired with an injured air. "What a curious thing our meeting so."

His voice trembled, but it was with passion as he answered,

"What right have you to speak to me?"

"Right! If it come to that," and she shrugged her shoulders, "as good a right as most; but that's old ground, I shan't go over it."

"You had better not."

"Your temper hasn't improved, I see. Suppose I have no right, you might have been civil enough to wish me good afternoon."

"What brought you here?"

"Don't speak in that tone, you haven't any control over me now; but if you wish to know, I came down to help the

100th in their theatricals. I've enjoyed myself, they are nice fellows and gave me my dresses, lovely ones !"

Frank turned his face away to the window, shame and hatred struggling in it for mastery.

"Don't be such a bear, Frank. It is unlucky our being thrown together in this way; but I don't see why we should quarrel as it's only for an hour or so. It was when we were tied to each other for life it was unbearable. I like you very well for a day, and you can be pleasant when you choose."

"You will drive me mad," he said, gloomily. "If we must bear each other's presence for a while, at least be silent, and make the infliction as small as possible."

"But I hate being silent," and the

voice was perfectly good-tempered, the pretty lips still kept their smile. "You used to like my talk once."

"Once! how dare you remind me of it—of my madness; you who have ruined my life, who are my shame and disgrace."

Miss St. Claire's blue eyes flashed lightning, her whole face changed with anger as she answered,

"Your shame and disgrace! I don't know what you mean, but your words are a lie. We had vile tempers, both of us, we could not be happy together and we separated; but how am I your shame and disgrace more than you are mine."

Hers was a vehement passion, his a silent one, and his tone was cool and quiet as he answered,


"To avoid old grounds, is it nothing

for a man to hear his wife's name bandied about in clubs and cafés, to hear the sneers that—"Oh, my God!" he lost his coolness, "and you ask me how you are my shame."

"Yes! I do. I am no worse and no better than when you married me, or when we separated. I was a burlesque actress then, I am one now. You knew my nature when you married me."

"I wish I had," Frank ground out between his teeth.

"I never hid it from you. You mean, you wish we had never married, so do I; but it is too late now. We must make the best of a bad job, it is hard for you to be tied to a woman you hate—it's hard lines for me, too, to be tied to a man who hates me; but that is no reason you should slander me," she added with an-



other burst of passion. "I am an honest woman at least."

The blue eyes sparkled with indignation, but two tear-drops stood in them; her lips were parted, her breast heaved, her small, gloved hands were tightly closed.

Frank looked at her.

"Very good," he said calmly; "you have improved in your profession, I wonder you don't go in for the legitimate drama."

His words were base and cruel and he knew it, but the memory of long hours of torture, of hatred, of the useless, dragging chain that linked him and this woman together was strong upon him as he spoke.

"And you wonder," she said passionately, "that I hate you, when you speak



---

so; I am in earnest, Mr. Lyndon, whatever you are, and I tell you plainly that I don't care what the world may say of me now; there never was a woman, much less an actress, separated from her husband, who wasn't spoken evil of, and if the ugly tales sting your ears and cause you pain, so much the better. I will be a shame and disgrace to you, since you call me so."

"Do your worst," he said bitterly, "but save me the present pain of listening to you."

Deep in his heart was the thought of Victoire, driving him almost to frenzy, making him feel his marriage bond a thousand times more galling than it would otherwise have been. Miss St. Claire said no more, but drew out from her travelling bag a railway novel, in which

she was soon apparently absorbed ; Frank from his corner watched the telegraph posts flashing past in the drizzling rain.


When they neared London, the rain had ceased, and in the west the clouds had separated, showing sky rifts of sullen red. Frank Lyndon and his wife were no longer in the same carriage with one another ; at Bristol, Frank had moved into another compartment, and Miss St. Claire's privacy had been invaded by a large family just arrived from Penzance by the Hayle steamer, and consisting of a kindly but weary mother, five children with faces more or less black, telling of attempts to explore the economy of the steamer's funnel, a nurse, a baby, three dolls, two bird-cages, a kitten, and a family of pet mice, not to speak of such

trifles as hoops, wooden spades, railway rugs and band-boxes.

"Frank had a lucky escape," was poor little Miss St. Claire's reflection, but she submitted patiently to the invasion, and being really good-natured and tired of her novel, made friends with the children and amused them in such a manner as made the tired mother inwardly invoke a blessing on her head.

But as Nellie St. Claire, or Lyndon, looked at the baby, there was a passionate yearning in her eyes which made its mother hold it out to her as though it had been a tray of refreshments, saying "Would you like to take him?"

It is exceedingly odd how fond some women are of having a baby in their arms, I cannot understand the taste myself, but there is no denying its existence.



---

Nellie was one of these women, and as she held the child closely to her, an instinct prompted its mother to say,

"Are you married? Have you a baby of your own?"

"I had," Nellie answered, "I lost it," and as the thought of the dead child came across her, the child whose death seemed to mark the time her severance from her husband had begun, the tears stood in her eyes.

"Lost it! you are very young."

"I am five-and-twenty, my baby has been dead five years."

As she spoke, another thought arose in her mind; it was four years since Frank and she had separated, four years since she had known any affection; she was an orphan, without relations except a brother in Australia, and the only love

now offered to her was such as it were dishonour to accept.

Her companions got out at Westbourne Park, and when the train reached Paddington, Nellie was alone in the carriage. She leant out of the window to catch a glimpse, when the train had stopped, of the tall brown-headed figure she knew; for a moment she saw him, busied in collecting his luggage, then he hailed a hansom and was driven off.

Nellie sighed, then turning round to gather up her various feminine belongings of travelling-bag, handkerchief, *en tout cas*, and those wonderful *et cetera* without which women of her calibre seem unable to travel; she too secured a hansom and drove to her little house in Albert Place, South Kensington.

How dreary it looked in the late twi-

light of the rainy September day, its stucco walls covered with red fast-fading Virginia creeper, and the scarlet geraniums and lobelias in the window-box, battered and straggling.

Poor Nellie did not feel over cheerful as she entered her home, and told her maid to get her a cup of tea directly; she must be at the "Phœbus" by eight. Her little drawing-room, opening into the dining-room, was bright with a fire, but it looked lonely to Nellie, and as her eye fell on the coloured photograph of the child she had lost, she burst into violent sobs as she walked up and down the room.

"Oh! baby, if you had lived it might have been different, oh! to see him again and love him more than ever, and to know that he hates me. I can't bear it,

I can't— It was all my fault he couldn't stand my temper and my flirting. Why was I so silly? Why did I not show him that letter? Oh! my hateful pride! but why should he have thought? He should have known I loved him. He was right, but since I have lost him, I have been worse than ever. I am his shame, I know it, but I love him, and he will never be fond of me again, never think me good, never."

The words came brokenly between her sobs; her love for her husband, the husband whom she said truly, she had made miserable, had awakened at the sight of him to new life, and she longed, oh, how terribly for the affection she had thrown away.

She sat down at her trinket-laden writing-table, pulled the pen and ink towards her and wrote.

---

"Dear Frank,

"I was wrong to-day. I know I was a trouble to you, and that since we parted I have been very foolish; but not wicked, Frank, I know what people say, but it is a lie, indeed it is.

"And I will be different if you will only forgive me. I don't mean that we should come together again, that is impossible, but if you will think kindly of me and try to like me a little, just a little for the sake of old times.

"I have kept that wretched letter, you may see it and know it was nothing.

"NELLIE."


She put the tiny note into an envelope, held it in her hand for a moment, looking at it, then with a flash of quick pride threw it into the fire.



"No! I will not ask his pardon; he insulted me. I won't cringe to him like a dog."

She was standing by the fire, when the maid brought in her tea and the lamp, the light of which revealed a pretty, trifling room furnished in pale tints of grey and rose, with rather too much gilding and lace curtain, but cosy and cheerful in the mellow radiance of fire and lamp, and making a frame that suited its mistress, who leant against the velvet mantel-board, her pretty head reflected in the glass above.

Very bewitching she looked in her pale blue dress, nearly hidden by a large, fur-lined black silk cloak, a piece of point d'Angleterre was carelessly tied round her neck, and her shining hair gleamed under a big slouched hat of black straw and



feathers, relieved by the glistening green of a king-fisher's wing.

She turned round as the servant entered, and drew up her arm-chair to the fire, while the girl placed the tea on a small gipsy-table by her side, and stirred the flames to a blaze.

A spectator would have said Nellie was the very picture of lazy enjoyment, as she sipped her tea and nibbled the delicate omelette that accompanied it, glancing now and then at a French novel, which was open beside her plate, and giving bits to her pet dog, a Maltese terrier, smallest, whitest, and fluffiest of its kind, and only recognizable as an animal by a pair of beady black eyes, a tiny nose, and a very pink tongue.

Miss St. Claire finished her tea, glanced at the clock, took Doodah (the pink-

tongued atom) on her lap, and rang the bell again.

"Call a hansom, Charlotte, and tell cook two or three people are coming back to supper with me. You must lay for four, and get some oysters, I will bring a pâté with me; I can get it at Fortnum's as I pass."

Nellie had a good salary, and could afford luxuries to the extent now and then of an oyster and *foie-gras* supper for herself and one or two chosen friends; and these small festivals were pleasant enough with the pleasantness which belongs to fêtes given in "the city of Prague," besides which, Nellie, though not a clever woman, had the talent of understanding and drawing forth the cleverness of others.

Yet as she rattled along Piccadilly wards in her hansom, past the soft

gloom of Kensington Gardens, and the tawdry, shabby, glaring brightness of Knightsbridge, the remembrance came across her of another supper she had planned and shared in six years ago, a gayer one than this of to-night could hope to be.

Her thoughts went back into the past, she and Frank had been married six months, she was playing small soubrette parts and fascinating widows in the opening pieces; Frank six and seven speech parts at that dainty theatre, the "Drawing-room." She had just received the offer of a good engagement at another theatre, an offer so good it seemed like fame and fortune to the girl.

She remembered her husband's words, "Why, Nell, you will have a larger screw than I!" she recalled her own proud glee

as she laughed back in answer, and how after the first night of her new engagement, they had dashed home together in a hansom, Nell on her husband's knee and and a friend of Frank's, an actor, Dick Mattocks by name, accompanying them ; she remembered how they had stopped at Scott's to secure the largest obtainable lobster. " You must pay for it, Nell, you are the richest, you know."

She could see their Gower Street lodging, the ground-floor room, with the tapestry carpet and frightful red flock paper, and the supper laid on the round, centre table.

What though the lodging-house glass and linen were coarse compared to the dainty table equipments that would greet her eyes when she returned to Albert Place? what though the supply of knives

was small, and two of the four chairs rickety? What matter when the fire crackled and gleamed, and Frank teased her gaily on her success, and they all three laughed, when Mr. Mattocks produced his contribution to the feast, a bottle of whisky and a jar of caviare.


How good that supper was, how fresh the lobster and salad, how new the bread, how miraculous in flavour the Stilton. There was no champagne in those days; but Nellie did not miss it, she drank shandy-gaff and thought it nectar, and Frank's sea experiences had taught him the art of being contented, which since then he had had time to forget.

Not much more than two years after that, Frank Lyndon and his wife were standing face to face in the little drawing-room of their house in Pelham Crescent,

it was nearly midnight, the gaslight fell on a miserable man, a no less miserable woman.

The love between them had grown cold ; day by day, after her baby's death, Nellie had tried to stifle her sorrow by excitement, and had succeeded ; she was a flirt by nature, and the life she led encouraged the propensity ; even her love for her husband could not conquer her insensate thirst for admiration, and it maddened Frank to see her smiles flung to other men, even while he ceased to care for them himself.

He did not remonstrate, he only grew moody and sullen ; Nellie had not the quick intuition of some women, she thought her husband's jealousy indifference, and so did her worst for her happiness by flirting till even the Bohemian



world began to talk. And their intercourse had changed, the fond, foolish words, the little gentlenesses of married life had gone; so things went on, the gulf between them growing wider and wider, till one night Frank came home, stung to fury by words he had overheard at his club, a sneer at himself, a light coupling of his wife's name with that of a man whom he knew as a somewhat constant visitor at his own house.

Long ago a wronged woman bitterly told the world that "*le respect cesse quand l'amour finit,*" and this was true in Frank's case; he no longer loved his wife, and his faith had fled with his love, he believed the words he had heard, and hurried home in a blind rage of shame and doubt.

Nellie had not returned home when he





opened the door at Pelham Crescent; he went straight upstairs to the drawing-room, and there, on the table, addressed in his wife's hand was a letter to the very man he had heard spoken of; she had written it before going to the theatre.

For one moment Frank Lyndon's love for his wife returned, or he thought it did.

"Oh my God!" he muttered, "and I trusted her."

There was the rustling sound of a dress, of light feet running up the stairs, and Nellie stood before him at the open door, Nellie in her pretty dress of soft, pale green cashmere, and the blue Venetian beads at her throat, a dainty vision marred by the stage paint still on her face.

He looked at her and all love  
vanished.



---

"Shut the door," he said, "I want to speak to you."

His voice was stern and thick, she obeyed, wondering; he mistook her astonished look for guilty fear, and his face grew darker.

It frightened her, though she would not show it; she burst into a little nervous laugh.

"What is it?" she said, "you look as tragic——"

She stopped, fairly alarmed and trembling nervously, but still trying not to show her fear.

"You do not know?"

"Know what? Really, Frank, you must be mad," but her lips were quivering, her eyes terrible with fright; she was afraid she knew not of what, he thought it was of discovery.

---

"I want to know what this letter means," he said, his pent up passion breaking forth.

Then she understood.

For a moment she held her breath with anger; he, her husband suspected her; then he should suffer, she would fool him to the top of his bent; she forgot the cause she had given him for suspicion by foolish coquetry, her fastness, her ill-temper, she only remembered that a year ago he would not have doubted her, and was furious and indignant.

"It is a letter to Baby Verrall," she answered calmly.

"I can see that, I did not know my wife corresponded with Major Verrall, but since it is so I should wish to read your letter."

---

"You wish to read that letter," she repeated.

"Yes."

"You shall not," she said, under her breath. "How dare you?"

"How dare I!" he strode hastily across the room for a few moments, then stopped before her. "Once for all, will you let me read that letter?"

The fire of defiant pride blazed up in her eyes, as she fiercely answered,

"No."

The letter lay on the table, he looked at but did not touch it.

"I wonder you have not opened it," she said; she was blindly defiant of fate, lost to the sense of aught except her anger and her pride, and careless of the future.

He did not answer, he could not repeat

---

the words he had heard, the words that had made his blood boil; yet he was sure he was in the right, if that letter was one she could show him without shame, why did she not do so?

At last he spoke.

"Do you refuse?"

"Yes, you should trust me."

"Trust you! why? to be cheated, I have trusted you long enough."

For a moment Nellie wished to yield, but then her pride overcame; had he loved, he would never have doubted her, that was her thought. She did not know the full weight of the evidence against her, still less that her flirtation with Major Verrall was freely discussed by people she had never seen or heard of.

"Then we must separate," said Frank.

Of course," said Nellie calmly, and

feeling as though she had lost everything that made life worth living.

Frank allowed his wife two hundred a year, he was far more anxious than she was that there should be no scandal. The idea of being the object of men's pity was intolerable to him. "Our tempers did not agree," he said quietly to any friend who was courteous enough to question him on the subject, and at other times he so entirely ignored the fact of his marriage, that the world in time came almost to forget it.

He withdrew himself as far as was possible from the theatrical set in which he had lived since his marriage, thereby making himself heartily detested by most members of the aforesaid set, and tried as far as he could to re-enter that society of which the members toil not, neither do

they spin. He liked his profession, but his morbid pride or vanity continually revolted against the slight signs, the careless words which showed him that society, so-called, considered him in it but not of it.

He had wrecked his life, and that by his own fault; he had married with little love, except a boy's blind passion, and the fruits were bitter; if he could have at once cast every moral constraint, he would have been in one sense happier, but the refinement of his nature prevented this and only made him feel his marriage an intolerable weight, dragging him down, preventing him from reaching to anything better.

He looked at the skeleton in the cupboard as seldom as he could, but he knew it to be there, and the knowledge em-

bittered his nature. Since he had known Victoire his life seemed unendurable without her, and with the knowledge that though they loved each other, their love was of no avail.

It was different with Nellie, the severance from her husband, the sudden snapping of the ties that bound them together, the knowledge of the lifeless bond that still existed, nay, her very love for Frank hardened her, and made her reckless of the world's opinion—till in the wild pain of remorse which sometimes seized her, she was fiercely glad that he too must suffer, that every light or scornful word he heard spoken of the wife he did not love was torture to his pride, and yet that he was bound to her for life.

She was glad of it sometimes, but not to-night, the sight of him had softened



her strangely, while it made her far more miserable than she had been for years, and when this evening her cab stopped at the stage door of the "Phœbus" Miss St. Claire had to dry the tears from her eyes.





## CHAPTER IX.

“ For winter’s rains and ruins are over,  
And all the season of snows and sins,  
The days dividing lover from lover,  
The light that loses the night that wins.”

ATALANTA IN CALEDON.

**S**IX months since she had seen him,  
this was Victoire Treherne’s  
thought as she stood by the  
window of her room, smoothing out a  
ribbon.

The room was a very good example of  
tidy disorder, two trunks were open on

the floor, dresses were spread out on the bed, raiment of all kinds, cloaks, hats, boots, and boxes containing gloves, ties and handkerchiefs &c., were lying about the room.

It was April, a soft day with a pale, blue sky, woods that were hardly yet green, white, rose-flushed orchards and fields yet bright and tender. In the garden below, the laburnum and lilac stirred languidly with the west wind, and the white butterflies fluttered over them.

Victoire felt the sweet influence of the day, it seemed like a promise of hope after the long dreary winter, during which she had sometimes felt as though her heart would break from the longing for the happiness she had put from her, and her chief thought had been, "does he

ever think of me? does he know I loved him?" Oh! what a hard, dark winter it had seemed.

Her grandmother had been at a loss to imagine what could be the matter with the girl, for Victoire had altered strangely, was fitful and restless, sometimes almost irritable. Mrs. Treherne knew nothing of the ceaseless pain that gnawed at the girl's heart, influencing her even when she forgot its presence.

If the idea that Victoire was in love occurred to Mrs. Treherne, it was always in connection with that of Raymond Marchant, and she congratulated herself very sincerely on having sent Victoire off to Truro the day before Raymond wrote to say he thought of, on that day week, paying his autumn visit to Polwhyn, and on the attack of bronchitis which had

---

kept her grandson a prisoner in London at Christmas, instead of coming down to Cornwall as he had intended.

She did not want them to marry, she was very sure of that; one reason of her dislike to the idea was unacknowledged even to herself, Victoire was far too young, and she could not spare her yet.

The girl had a weary winter, for all her occupations, except reading and acting, had lost their interest, and what use was reading when every love-story only recalled the sharp fresh memory of her own? or how could she act the parts she had studied with him, when their every word brought back his voice, and with it the yearning pain for one look, one word, till she was frightened to find how strongly her love for Frank had interwoven itself with her life.

---

None but herself knew the lonely sadness of those dark evenings, when she sat in the fire-lit library, knowing the world outside was one weary drift of snow, craving for Frank's presence, and wondering if this were the end of the life she had so hungered for; if the history of her love's day were over, and there remained for her only a blank monotony of duty or nothing. What hope or help was there for her? what could make up to her for what she had lost?

But these were winter thoughts, and now it was spring, and the great bunches of blue-bells and Lent-lilies Victoire had gathered that morning scented the room, the young leaves waved in the spring breeze outside. Victoire was going to London, for the first time in her life, with her uncle and his wife, she would see all

the places she had read of, go to the opera, dances, and the theatres, (the true country-girl enumeration of London delights, even in this advanced age,) and perhaps see him—that last hope illumined all the rest.

The only knowledge she had gained of Frank since they parted, had been through the theatrical advertisements and critiques in the *Times*. She had looked one day to see if his name might chance to be in that long column, that being till then simply a dead letter to her, she had never cared to read, her knowledge of the stage not extending later than the time of Kelly's "Reminiscences," and Bernard's "Retrospection," but when she found Frank's name there, it became her one excitement to look for criticisms of the theatre where he was engaged.

---

"Yes, she might see him," she thought, as she turned to fold a dress before placing it in the trunk, "perhaps he would not catch sight of her, but if he did—— It is of no use," she said, with a sickening of the heart, "no use, so why should I think of it?"

Nevertheless she did think of it, and turned to the glass, wondering if she were changed since he had seen her.

She was changed and improved, the slight figure was more softly rounded, the grey eyes had gained depth, the mouth sweetness; it was the face of a woman, not of a child, as it had been when Frank had first met her.

The door-handle was turned and Mrs. Treherne entered the room, she had a leathern case in her hands.



"Here, Vic," she said, "is your woman's *toga virilis*, if the contradiction be allowable. I did not give them to Lois, but I have no use for them now."

*They* were a string of pearls with an opal clasp; Victoire gasped as she saw them.

"Your pearls! Grandmamma I couldn't."

"I would rather I gave them to you than that my death did, dear," Mrs. Treherne's tone was unusually tender, "you are a good child."

"Oh! grandmamma, how could I ever say I would leave you for three months! I don't want to go, I would rather stay here."

Victoire meant what she said, and would have kept her word, had not Mrs. Treherne replied briskly,

"Nonsense, my dear, I want you to go, you need change, and the polishing will do you good ; but mind and take advantage of your music lessons."

"I am glad Aunt Julia taught me to dance last year, and that that Miss Barnes staying with the Onslows has given me practice. Isn't it strange, grandmamma, that the old step you used to dance as a girl, and that grandpapa taught me when I was little, Aunt Julia says has come in again, or nearly the same?"

"Your Uncle George would laugh at the success of Raymond's attempts to make a superior woman," said Mrs. Treherne.

"I don't think Raymond minds dancing," said Victoire, seriously, but Mrs. Treherne looked in vain for any sign

of self-consciousness at the mention of Raymond's name.

"The first time I ever waltzed," said the old lady, "Captain Lyndon was my partner; how well he danced!"

"Was he like his grandson?"


"Yes, but handsomer and taller; a larger man altogether than Mr. Lyndon."

Victoire said no more; she felt herself flushing at the mere mention of his name, and turned again to her packing.

"And now about money."

"What?" said Victoire, vaguely.

"Your aunt will see about getting you evening dresses and anything you may want, but here are five pounds for your pocket-money, keep an account of it and don't be extravagant," as Victoire's eyes



opened wide and she turned the crisp note over in her hand, she had never had as much money in her life before.

"But I don't want it, grandmamma; I shouldn't know what to do with it."

"Then it is time you learnt; you will find plenty of ways to spend it."

"I feel like Evelina or Miss Austen's heroines leaving home," cried Victoire, joyously; "there's the lunch bell, let's come down. I'm afraid I'm a great trouble to you."

A sudden touch of pain hurt Mrs. Treherne at these words, she knew Victoire would never have said them to her mother, but she only answered,

"Not more so than other girls. Ah,

that reminds me! Of all things, Victoire, don't catch up slang or fast ways. I tell you, I simply couldn't bear it; you talk like a lady now, don't get into bad habits."

"I won't," said Victoire, holding back to let Mrs. Treherne pass downstairs. "Oh! I've such an appetite, and I shan't taste junket or saffron cake again for three months!"






## CHAPTER X.

"How easy is it for the proper false  
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms.  
Alas ! our frailty is the cause, not we."

TWELFTH NIGHT.

"ELL, Victoire, very tired !"  
"No, Uncle George, not at  
all."

"One would think you were a London  
girl trained to the round, by the quantity  
of work you get through, you never seem  
done up."

"It is so new and pleasant. Do you

know it is always an excitement to me seeing the real shops I have read the advertisements of, and the publishers and music-sellers?"

"Well! that is a cheap amusement, at all events," said Mr. Treherne, laughing, "I only wish I were as easily contented. I suppose, though, you wish for some wilder dissipation this afternoon; where shall we go?"

"To the Monument," answered Victoire, promptly.

"The Monument! have you any idea what it is, when you ask such a thing of an elderly gentleman? You have dragged me to the Tower, and the Abbey, and St. Paul's, but the Monument——!"

"I won't go if you don't like it."

"Nonsense, child, I'll take you. I only want to know the reason for our

emulating St. Simon Stylites, is it, (to reverse John Willet,) because it's a nice quiet amusement, no wine and no young men? By the by, has Raymond been here?"

"He looked in for a moment and left the tickets for to-night," and Victoire blushed so redly, that her uncle was more than ever assured that his old suspicions were well founded.

"What theatre did he get them for?" said Mr. Treherne, unfolding the programme wrapped round the pink cards. "Ah the 'Areopagus!' let's look at the bill of fare? The 'Colleen Bawn,' oh hang—— never mind it will suit you, little country mouse."

"Isn't it a good play?"

"An excellent piece of business Madam niece, would 'twere done. Who acts? not



that the names will enlighten me much. I never look at the theatre news, and don't know any actors except the old favourites. By Jove! here is one I do know though, 'Hardress Cregan—Mr. Frank Lyndon.' Why! Vic that must be our friend."

Victoire did not speak, she felt horribly guilty, her uncle continued.

"He never told us he was on the stage; I suppose he was afraid we should be shocked, but I should have thought better of him if he had told it straight out. I expect though it would have horrified my mother."

Victoire made an effort to speak the truth as far as she could. "He did tell me," she said, "the last day he was at Polwhyn."

"Well I suppose it was his own

business, but still—— Is your aunt down yet? she wasn't when I went out."

"She is upstairs with a dressmaker, being tried on."

Mr. Treherne shrugged his shoulders.

"Pleasant occupation. Well! Victoire, if you really wish to carry your bucolic sight-seeing propensity to the extent of climbing the Monument stairs, you had better get ready, but I pity the man who may be your husband."

The girl's face was turned from him, he could not see its look, as though a sharp arrow had pierced her heart—and her tone was gay as she answered, "Why?"

"Fancy what a honeymoon he will have with your appetite for sight-seeing and gaiety. As a rule women care for one

or the other, but you—you don't care if it's a ball, or the British Museum, or the Phœbus Theatre."

"No, uncle, I don't like burlesques, at least not that one we saw, it was silly," and Victoire's cheek flushed.

"That was a pretty girl, though, that you fell in love with, and so did I, but don't tell your aunt."

"Miss St. Claire! Oh, wasn't she pretty? and she wasn't vulgar like the others, I should like to know her."

"You goose! well I hope to-night's experience of the legitimate drama will render you more sensible."

"Is the 'Colleen Bawn' legitimate?"

"It's in five acts, I'm rather curious to see our acquaintance; I can't get over his coolness in keeping his profession a secret."

"But it hadn't anything to do with us, Uncle George."

"I don't think your grandmother would have said so, Miss Pert."

"And I tell you he did tell me."

"You, you chit! I suppose though he intended to tell my mother through you. Did you tell her?"

"No."

"So! Conscience made a coward of you."

Indeed it had, innocent as her secret was, its weight pressed heavily upon her.

"But you would know him still?" she asked.

"Of course, it makes no difference to me. Actor or no actor, he's a very nice fellow, when he isn't gloomy and melancholic, but run up and get your things on."

Victoire obeyed, and she and her uncle started on their expedition, which proved to be rather a tiring one. She was glad, when she came back, of the cup of afternoon tea and the quiet hour that followed. Mrs. Treherne, her aunt, was out, her uncle retired to his den for a cigar, and the girl sat alone in the drawing-room with a volume of Mrs. Browning's poems in her hand, reading what she knew by heart, "Caterina to Camoens."

"Sweetest eyes, how sweet in flowing  
The repeated cadence is!"

She remembered how Frank's voice had given a personal meaning to those words, and his eyes had met hers; she read no more, but sat gazing into the fire and thinking of him, his voice, his look, the

careless wave of his hair, the level line of his brows, the every feature of the face she remembered so well.

She would see him, she would see him; do what she might, her heart would leap at the thought, she would hear the voice again, the very memory of which thrilled her as with pain.

Gladness and sorrow were so mingled in her thoughts, that she could not separate them, but the latter feeling predominated. They were strangers now, and it was scarcely likely, thought the girl, that the memory of last August was all to him as it was to her. He might almost have forgotten her, his life was so different to hers; he had other things to think of, and she had one beautiful thing to ponder over—his love.

And yet, and yet—

She was so young that hope would spring up; that one sweet month, that bitter evening could not be the beginning and end of her love, there must be a future still to come.

"So you are dressed, Vic," said her aunt as she entered the drawing-room at seven o'clock. "It's vexing Raymond not being able to go with us."

"Yes," said Victoire turning round, "but he couldn't put off his engagement, Aunt Julia. I do hope we shan't be late, I've been trying not to fidget but——"

"You ridiculous child, come and eat your dinner, you can't live on excitement. Do you really mean you want to see the beginning?"

"I can't bear missing the first scene," said Victoire pleadingly. "It's as bad

---

as beginning a novel at the second volume."

Mrs. Treherne laughed. "Don't be frightened," she said, "we shall be in plenty of time; your uncle says you expect to see an old acquaintance."

So, he had told his wife; it was with a slight effort that Victoire answered.

"Yes, Mr. Lyndon was staying at Polwhyn; I told you about him last year."

"But you didn't mention his profession; I'm rather curious to see him, George says he is very good looking; by the way I went to the Braithwaites this afternoon, and it turns out they are going to the 'Areopagus' this evening, and have the stalls next to ours."

"The wittles waits," said Mr. Treherne, entering the room at this moment, "if



you two women are lifted above the ordinary needs of life by your excitement, I beg to state I am not."

"Excitement!" said his wife laughing.

"Exactly, I am glad you see how unfitted to your age such a feeling must ever be. If you don't give Victoire Hannah More's lectures on *Mores* (I beg pardon) I must."

"Did you apologise for your pun," said his wife laughing. "If so, you did right, a viler one I never heard."

"I wasn't aware your classical acquirements would allow you to construe it."

"Well, but Victoire! You know the indigo dye of her stockings?"

"I wasn't frightened of it, I don't believe in women's learning, even when acquired under so able a teacher as Ray-

mond Marchant; Fra Lippo's words will fit learned ladies.

" ' Flower of the clove,  
All the Latin I construe is *amo*, I love.' "

" Nonsense, Victoire dragged Charlie through all the declensions last year."

" Miserable boy! he was very glad to come back to my teaching. Wasn't he, Vic ?"

Victoire did not answer, nor did she speak much either at dinner, or during the drive to the theatre.





## CHAPTER XI.

" Oh le pesant fardeau qu'un hymen inégal,  
Une petite femme est souvent un grand mal."

" LES DEUX PUCELLES."—ROTROU.

**T**HE theatre was full, and Mrs. Treherne found her friends in the next stalls to hers, her husband set between her and Victoire, and tried to talk to his niece, but she was silent and *distracte*.

She was wondering if Frank would see her, or be so absorbed in his part as not to notice anything off the stage. The

thought that even now he might be within a few feet of her, hidden only by that green curtain, made her heart seem as though it would stifle her by its beating, as the overture ceased and the curtain rose on the well known play.

The "Colleen Bawn" is almost, if not quite played out; but the present revival had been successful owing to the all round excellence of the cast, and the appearance of a new and charming Eily, a girl of sixteen, with a lovely face and enough talent to make her beauty seem ten times greater.

But whether or no the "Colleen Bawn" be worn out, hackneyed and sensational, to Victoire it was quite fresh. She knew nothing of the tale, she could not even guess what manner of part Frank's would be, or when he would appear, and for a

---

few moments she was absorbed by the charm of the stage picture—the old house with its gleaming windows, the moonlit sea, the rocky coast, the distant light. The music ceased; a dark crooked figure crept along the stage and crouched in the shadow of the rocks, there was some applause, and Hardress Cregan descended the steps of the house and came forward on the stage.

For a moment Victoire doubted, then her heart gave one great leap, it was he himself.

How handsome he looked! how rarely well the quaint dress, the lace cravat, the fair peruke became him, and yet could he ever look as he had that afternoon in the orchard? "Victoire, Victoire, you know I love you."

The words came back as though he

himself repeated them, it was his voice that roused her from her dream. Frank acted well, there was no doubt of that, the part of Hardress is a dreary one, but he breathed life into it; the proud, careless, slightly supercilious grace, the tinge of moody melancholy which came naturally to him, gave charm to the play. Victoire thought his art perfect, but there were ill-natured people who said Mr. Lyndon made all his characters exactly alike, and there might be some truth in the remark.

"It is my fault, I alone will suffer."

As he spoke the words, Frank Lyndon's eyes fell on Victoire; meeting her absorbed gaze, she knew that he saw her, she noted the swift gleam on his face and averted her eyes. She could not have

told her feelings even to herself, she half wished he had not caught sight of her and yet was glad he had, from that moment Hardress was the play to Victoire.

The act drop fell, and the girl drew a long breath, she had had her wish, had seen him again.

"Very good, Victoire," said her uncle, "our friend knows how to act; wonderfully good-looking he is, the handsomest fellow almost I know, and he had the sense not to make up too much; I hate a *jeune premier* to look like a hair-dresser's dummy."

"Are you speaking of Lyndon?" said the gentleman on the other side of Mrs. Treherne. "Yes, that's one thing about that fellow I particularly admire. He knows his own good looks and comes on

the stage with a calm assurance of them, that takes the place of talent, and which other men who depend on the rouge pot for beauty can't emulate. His perfect self-conceit is a great gift."

Victoire's cheeks blazed, but she dared not answer for fear of betraying how hot her anger was, and remained silent; Mr. Treherne spoke.

"You think Lyndon vain, well I've met him but I can't say I've remarked it. Do you know him?"

"No, I think actors are made too much fuss of now-a-days. Their being let into society, in the way they are, is a great mistake to my mind."

General conversation among a party in the stalls of a theatre is an impossibility; the effort of speaking across people is too great, and after Mrs. Treherne saying



briefly, "I don't see why they shouldn't, if they are gentlemen," the talk drifted back into duologues.

Victoire's pride was stung, not for herself but for Frank; she was not ashamed of him, or her love for him, pain as it was, but it galled her that this man dared speak of him so.

She was heartily glad when at the end of the second act he took his leave, and Mrs. Braithwaite, the lady who had been on his other hand, moved into his stall so as to talk to Mrs. Treherne.

The play neared its end, whatever cause had wrought Frank up, he acted as he had seldom done; warmth was what he usually needed, and to-night he did not lack it; but it was in the short stormy scene with his mother towards the end of the play, that the Hardress of

the night was fairly won out of himself; the Mrs. Cregan was a true artist, and the acting became as reality.

Behind the scenes some wondered at the unusual warmth and pathos of Lyndon's acting, while in front, the bitter, remorseful grief, the passionate and anguished cry, "Oh, Eily, Eily!" hushed the audience into silent intentness.

That was the last moment of the drama to Victoire, she heeded little after except perhaps Frank's glad rapture at the sight of his rescued wife.

The curtain fell, the applause ceased, only to wake again the louder, Frank, splendid in his court suit of lilac and silver, came forward, leading on Eily; a great bouquet of flowers fell at the girl's feet, he picked it up and presented it,

stood back to let her pass off, bowed and followed.

Victoire had his last look, and then the whole theatre, the audience, the lights and the curtain seemed one blank to her, till she was roused by hearing her uncle say.

"Do either of you want to stay the burlesque?"

"What do you say, Victoire?"

"I don't care Aunt Julia, it is as you like."

"So you are *blasée* already," said Mr. Treherne, "well, Julia, it is for you to decide."

"Oh! I think we will stay, they say it is very good."

"So be it then; but my throat is so dry that I must go and refresh it with some vitriol and soapsuds, I mean a B.

and S., if I am to stand an hour of breakdowns and music-hall songs, sung out of tune."

"Mr. Lyndon is charming, Victoire," said her aunt, "if he is as nice off the boards as he is on them, I envy you his acquaintance."

Victoire murmured something, she did not know what.

"The only fault I could find was in the earlier scenes, I thought him a cold lover."

"The part is cold."

"Yes, but even then, and with such a pretty Eily. What a dreadful old drop-scene it is, and the whole house would be the better for a cleaning. No, thank you," as an attendant neared them, "I don't know though; would you like an ice, Victoire? We are country cousins


and may do dreadful things, don't tell anyone you saw us though," she added, turning to Mrs. Braithwaite.

"On the contrary, I will have one too."

Victoire was thankful for her ice, though it was dry and gritty, with that saline flavour which seems peculiar to ices obtained in a theatre, for it cooled her hot cheeks.

She was leaning back in her stall, gazing at the cracks and creases of the painted red satin drop scene, and at the grimy plaster figures adorning the proscenium, when Mr. Treherne returned, followed by a gentleman in orthodox evening dress.

"I have brought an old friend, Vic, whom I found outside, Mr. Lyndon, my wife."



Frank bowed to Mrs. Treherne, and as her husband reseated himself, shook hands with Victoire, and seated himself in the stall on her other hand, which happened to be vacant.

The thought of their last meeting was in the minds of both, but neither showed any signs of what was passing in their minds, and it was only when the overture of the burlesque began, that Frank addressed Victoire particularly.

"I was utterly amazed to see you here to-night."

"Were you?" said Victoire, stupidly, then she added, "I wonder sometimes myself if I can really be away from Cornwall?"

"How is Mrs. Treherne?"

"Very well indeed."

"She is not in town?"

"Oh, no."

A pause, then Frank,

"And Polwhyn?"

"It was beautiful when I left, all the orchards were in bloom."

"And you, have you been well?"

His voice grew lower and tenderer, and his eyes looked at her face as though he would fain read the history of all her thoughts. Victoire wondered if he could guess at the long sad days which had seemed as though they must needs line the forehead and dim the eyes; she looked at him as she answered, his face was surely more worn than it had been eight months before.

"Yes, I have been very well, don't I look so?"

"Yes; and yet you are a little altered."

---

"Old age," said Victoire; "I am eighteen and a half."

Frank smiled, the old melancholy, rather cynical smile she remembered, then asked,

"Is this your first visit to a London theatre?"

"No, we have been twice before, the Helicon and the Phœbus."

Frank kept his face under control.

"Which did you like best?"

"To-night best of all."

"The play is great rubbish, a stilted melo-dramatic thing, good situations though; what did you think of Miss Delancy, she is pretty, isn't she? Eily just suits her."

"I think she is more than pretty."

"Did you notice her business in the



cottage scene after my entrance? it was new and very good."

"I did not notice it."

He understood the reason of that, that when Hardress Cregan had been on the stage Victoire had had eyes for no one else, and he could not help being glad.

"Have you been out much?" he asked, rather abruptly.

"I think so, we have only been a week in London, and I have seen so much, it seems a month."

"Any dances?"

"No, not yet; we are going to a large one at the Rolts the week after next."

"Sir William Rolt, in Princes Gardens?"

"Yes, Lady Rolt is Aunt Julia's sister; do you know them?"

"No, but I have a friend who knows them very well."

At this moment the overture ceased, and the burlesque began; it was a success, it would have been difficult to say why, for it was stupid and pointless, with tuneless songs and gaudy dresses, but it had taken the taste of the town.

Frank spoke once to Victoire.

"Is this the stage of your imagination?"

She shook her head.

"And you are in front, think what it must be to those who are behind the scenes."

"But this is only one side of it."

"Then the other is like the moon's obverse, never seen by mortals; if you

were on the stage it would no longer charm you."

"It does not—now."

What did her words mean? they were a little bitter, very sad. Frank realized that she was no longer the child he had known, and his heart reproached him that he had been the first to break the peace of her early girlhood.

Frank saw Mrs. Treherne and her niece to the carriage, learnt their address, and at Mrs. Treherne's invitation, promised to call. He stood for a moment looking at the vanishing brougham, and then betook himself to a theatrical club, where, as one member declared, he acted admirably as a wet blanket; it has been said before that Mr. Lyndon was not an universal favourite, and to-night he was anything but genial.

---

"It strikes me," said a gentleman, the Dick Mattocks mentioned some way back, "that the Count (Frank's soubriquet) isn't all right."

This remark was made when Frank had taken his departure, after drinking two tumblers of cold whisky-and-water, smoking a couple of cigars, and severely snubbing a cheerful youth, who had been exalting himself in a manner Mr. Lyndon had felt as aggravating.

"I don't see that anything's the matter with him," replied the cheerful youth; "he's confoundedly disagreeable, but that's nothing new."

"Well! I like Frank, he's a good fellow and a gentleman, even if he be crotchety; a good actor, too; a little cold, but clever enough."

"In a part that suits him," said the

youth, "but he has no individuality ; now when" (in a careless manner) "I was playing Lord Tinsel at the——"

"Yes, yes, my dear Bill," interrupted Mr. Mattocks, "we know all about that, you've made the remark before," and heedless of his companion's glare of angry scorn, he continued with serene imperturbability, "but about Lyndon, he really looks rather queer now and then, as though the facts of his life were too much for him."


The two men had left the club and were sauntering along the embankment, slowly enjoying their cigars.

"You mean his wife?"

"Poor devil, yes."

"Do you intend that for her?"

"Not so rude; I don't know any harm of her though, but she and Frank were



never suited. It was before your time, though; most people have forgotten that he is married."

"Perhaps *he* has; it's odd if *she* hasn't."

"She has not, she is a good little girl with all her faults."

The speaker threw his cigar end into the water.

"By Jove!" he said, after a short pause, "it's a hard case, both of them must feel it so, and I don't see what men of our profession are to do about marriage."

"Take Punch's advice," airily replied the cheerful youth, guiltily conscious that he himself intended to do the exact opposite.

"Yes, that's very well; but suppose one wishes to marry, what then? I, for

one, wouldn't marry an actress, as actresses go."


"I should think not; why, besides you and myself, Lyndon, and perhaps Bertie, there isn't a gentleman on the boards."

The supreme impudence and snobbishness of this remark only caused the very faintest flicker of a smile to pass over Dick Mattocks' face, but he looked down at his companion (he was a very large man and his friend unusually small, dapper and finikin,) very much as an enormous mastiff might look at a pert Mexican terrier.

"And actresses are worse," continued the cheerful youth.

There was not too much satire in Mr. Mattocks' tone as he answered,

"Exactly, I wouldn't marry a girl who



---

wasn't a lady, and a lady brought up as girls are wouldn't marry me, or if she did, we should both repent it."

"Why?"

"My dear fellow, a girl, and I wish a girl wife, a girl such as I mean couldn't reconcile herself to the necessities of an actor's life; remember Brandreth's case, there was an awful warning."

"Finding the wine always locked up; yes, that was hard, never to be able to procure any supper. There's a hansom, ta! ta! can't take you any way, I suppose?"

"No, thank you; good-night."

"There are Frank's rooms still lit up," thought Mr. Mattocks, as he glanced up at the windows of a house that faced the river; "'burning the midnight oil,' or



gas, a deuced deal too fast, I'm afraid."

If he had waited a moment or two longer, he would have seen the window-curtain drawn back and Frank's figure at the window.

Mr. Lyndon was alone in his rooms, which were comfortable and well furnished, though lacking something to make them cheerful; Frank stood by the window, looking out on the silent highway, which, vast and dark save for the floating specks of light, swept noiselessly on.

He was not looking well; the handsome face was almost haggard, as with a sigh he turned away from the window.

He sat down and wrote a note.



"Dear Charlie,

"You know the Rolts; be a good fellow, as you are, and get me a card for their dance next week. I know they don't mind Bohemians, or I wouldn't ask it.

"Yours ever,

"F. LYNDON."

Frank paused as he finished, his pen still resting on the paper.


"Is it even wise?" he thought; "if she ever hears—my God! what will she, what ought she to think of me? Had I not better leave her in peace, for my sake as well as her own?"

He threw down the pen as though loth to decide immediately, and sighing, took up a journal that lay on his writing-table, the new number of a "weekly social"

which he had not yet looked at. He glanced over the pages and was closing it, when a short paragraph caught his eye.

"I am sorry to hear that Miss Nellie St. Claire, one of the prettiest and most popular of our young actresses, has accepted an American engagement, I shall sadly miss her fresh face and winning manner at the 'Phœbus,' and so will many others. Cruel Columbia seems determined to rive from us all our fairest histrionic flowers."

Frank leant his head on his hand ; if Nellie left England his danger of detection would be lessened ; he did not think this out to himself, but he felt it all the same ; at last he pulled the note he had written towards him, folded and addressed it.



---

"My darling !" he said suddenly, "my darling, I will never hurt you, but I must see you sometimes, I cannot give that up."






## CHAPTER XII.

“ That fawn-skin dappled hair of hers,  
And that blue eye  
Dear and dewy,  
And that infantine, fresh air of hers.”

BROWNING.—“ A PRETTY WOMAN.”

“  NE and two and three, *one, two,*  
*three, one and two and three,*  
and so on.

“ Victoire, do leave that unfortunate instrument in peace.”

Victoire sprang up from the music stool.

"Raymond! Oh I'm so glad you have come, I've a message for you from auntie."

"She's out then?"

"Gone with Uncle George to buy a refrigerator, but my message is about your cricket match."

"Ah! Are you coming to Lords?"

"Do you think I would miss it. Why, Raymond, I haven't seen you play for four years."

"When did you play last, yourself?"

"Oh! Charlie kept me in practice last year at Truro, and very hard work it was, almost as bad as when you brought that boy down to Polwhyn eight years ago."

"What, Dal Gordon, do you remember him?"

"I should think I did."

"He's grown into a very nice fellow, I shall bring him to call."

Victoire shook her head.

"I don't know what he is now, but he was very nasty when he was thirteen; he used to play on me with the garden hose and offer to feel my muscle, which hurt horribly; but the cricket was worst of all."

"Poor Vic, I remember you, fielding among the gooseberry bushes and cabbages beyond the ha-ha fence after a night's heavy rain."

"You forgot the nettles," put in Victoire.

"And the mess your frocks and white socks were in at the end, and how grand-mamma scolded you."

"And you said it was all your fault."

---

"As it was, you simply acted under orders; but you haven't told me how you enjoyed yourself last night."

In truth, Victoire had been nervously avoiding the subject, so she only answered,

"Oh, very well," and fearful of being questioned further, began, with a sudden inspiration of tidiness, to arrange the music of the piano.

"Have you anything to do this morning?"

"Not till lunch; why?"

"Suppose you come for a walk in Kensington Gardens. It will do you good, you look rather pale."

"I don't want doing any good to," said Victoire rebelliously, "but I'll come; wait a moment till I've got my hat."




She ran away and soon reappeared, looking very dainty and fresh in her simple walking gear ; they were soon in Kensington Gardens ; the furnished house Mr. Treherne had taken for the season, being a small residence in Thurloe Square.

"When do you go up for your exam., Raymond ?" asked Victoire ; it was astonishing how difficult she found it to sustain a conversation with her cousin this morning.

"Not till next year—what's that ?" as they heard a girl's voice crying piteously.

"Doodah ! Doodah ! Oh ! you beast, go away, you'll kill my pet."

Another moment brought them to the scene of the fray, the combatants were one of the mongrel lurchers which infest



the shades of Kensington and a tiny Maltese terrier, whose mistress, evidently frightened out of her wits but "made bold by love," was poking valorously, though ineffectually at the lurcher with her parasol, a proceeding which neither of the combatants heeded in the least.

Two blows of Raymond's stick sent the lurcher off howling dismally, and Doodah's mistress stooped to pick up her rescued pet, who though he had had the worst of the battle, was utterly ungrateful for Raymond's interference and snarled savagely at his retreating foe.

"Oh! thank you, I am so much obliged, oh! Doodah, you naughty darling, what should I have done if it had killed you?" these sentences came breathlessly forth in a voice as pretty as the speaker's face.

"I don't think he is hurt," said Raymond.

"No; thanks to you; Doodah, thank your friend," but Doodah only curled up his lip and emitted a low growl as Raymond patted his head, though he allowed Victoire to stroke him, and even licked her ungloved hand with its tiny red tongue.

"He likes you," said his mistress, raising her eyes to Victoire's face.

The two women had not looked at each other till now; as they did so, the thought in Victoire's mind was "Oh! how pretty," in Nellie's "I was never like that."

For Victoire's face this morning wore its purest and brightest look of serene happiness, the gladness of her meeting with Frank still lingered on it, and made poor Nellie envious as she looked; here,

she thought, was a girl, the fragrance of whose maidenhood was as yet untainted and untouched.

Then a few more thanks from Miss St. Claire, a careless disclaimer from Raymond and mutual bows, and Doodah and his mistress took one direction, Victoire and her cousin another.

"Wasn't she charming?" said Miss Treherne.

"How do you mean? she was pretty enough, I can't think who she is, an actress I fancy, I know her face well enough."

"So do I," exclaimed Victoire, "I was wondering where I had seen her, she is that girl at the 'Phœbus,' Miss St. Claire."

"That's it of course; by Jove, how furious Dal Gordon would be if he knew

of this, he's terribly gone on her, and would give his ears for such a chance of making her acquaintance."

"Which you neglected. Oh! she is pretty, prettier than I thought her on the stage, I should like to know her," said Victoire, unconsciously repeating her yesterday's words to her uncle.

"Would you? Well I'm very glad you don't; I know you are stage struck, but for Heaven's sake don't learn the trick of deifying the drama's votaries."

Victoire's voice showed she was offended as she answered curtly,

"I don't know what you mean."

"My dear girl, of course you don't, because you don't know what a set I was speaking of."

Now, Victoire by no means relished her cousin's masterful tone, and she had her

own reasons for being angry, so there was some temper in her tone, as she answered.

"Are you quite certain you understand yourself?"

She would not have thought of answering thus a year ago, but her mental attitude towards Raymond had unconsciously undergone a change of late.

"Victoire!" his tone was one of blank astonishment. Victoire knew she had spoken hotly, and that he was not aware what had made her resent his speech, so made an *amende honorable* by saying, "I beg your pardon."





### CHAPTER XIII.


*Host.* This was a pretty riddling way of wooing.

*Lovel.* I oft have been too in her company,  
And looked upon her a whole day, admired her,  
Looked still, and loved and loved, and looked and  
sighed ;

But as a man neglected, I came off  
And unregarded.

*Host.* Could you blame her, Sir,  
When you were silent, and said not a word ?”

BEN JONSON.—“NEW INN.”

“RE you coming in to lunch ?”  
said Victoire, as they again  
stood on the doorstep at  
Thurloe Square.

"I can't, I've promised to lunch with a fellow at the Temple, Dal Gordon by the way. Shall I remember you to him?"

"Please do; is he as fond of cricket as ever?"

"You'll see him play on Thursday. Good morning."

Victoire nodded, and the door opening at that moment, she entered the house, while Raymond bent his steps towards Bell Yard.

"Hallo, Raymond! I'd almost given you up."

The speaker was a young fellow of twenty-one, a very fair specimen of the pleasantly blond type, which in his case was saved from insipidity by a mischievous mouth, and a pair of large pupilled, thick lashed blue eyes.

This individual was lounging on a






---

Dalrymple Gordon knew his friend's love secret, and had known it for two years; he and Raymond Marchant had been chums since Rugby days, and Raymond had found it a relief to be able to speak to Gordon of the feeling he kept hidden from the rest of the world, all the more so, that Dal never forced his friend's confidence.

"I hope you remembered me to her," he answered lazily.

Raymond laughed. "It strikes me that would have been adding insult to injury; she asked me to remember her to you, but her recollections of you didn't seem of the pleasantest nature."

"I liked her though, she was such a jolly unselfish little thing, and worshipped you, Raymond. Now I come to think of it, I don't fancy she did appreciate me."




"She says you played on her with the garden hose."

"A delicate way of implying that she was a flower and needed tending, refined homage is thrown away now-a-days," said Dal yawning and stretching himself full length on the sofa.

"When you've done talking nonsense, perhaps you'll remember you asked me to lunch, and it's nearly three o'clock."

"So it is," and Dal rose indolently. "Will you have a long or a short drink?" he inquired as he opened the door of his small sideboard.

"Long, my throat is as dry as a bone; why, Dal, what a scrumptious spread!" as his host produced a half finished Yorkshire pie, a tongue in the same condition, a large cake, a pot of apricot jam, and



two bottles of Bass, "have you come into a fortune?"

"Remains of a home hamper," said Dal, as he pulled out a cloth and other table gear. "The Mater knows when I'm hard up, bless her; here, Raymond," rummaging in the cupboard, and producing a Camembert cheese in a most unsavoury state of ripeness, "uncork the beer while I lay the table."

The luncheon was amply discussed, and when it was finished, neither of the young men seemed inclined to move further than to their old positions of the sofa and the arm-chair; Dal filled his meerschau in an artistic manner, while Raymond who made it a rule not to smoke in the day time, took up Punch; and Brat, the Skye terrier, stretched

herself on the one sunny spot of the carpet and went off to sleep.


"That's like Victoire," said Raymond, looking at a sketch in Punch.

"Here ! let me see."

It was one of Du Maurier's prettiest sketches of a young girl with a child ; the legend mattered little, but the refinement, the unconscious purity and grace of the principal figure were equally charming and real ; Raymond was right in saying it resembled Victoire.

"It's very like her," he repeated.

"She's awfully pretty if it is," said Dal. "The fellow can draw and no mistake, look at her dress and the way her arm is turned— Hang it ! old fellow, what's the matter ? you look as gloomy as — She hasn't refused you ?"



---

"I haven't asked her."

"Why! I thought you——" Dal stopped, he was not sure but that his friend might resent curiosity.

Raymond rose and walked up and down the room.

"I can't, and that's the truth, there's something prevents me; she isn't the same to me as she was six months back."

"What has changed her?"

"How the devil should I know?"

"Perhaps it is she has guessed what you are at; women are cute enough."

"It isn't that, and yet I feel certain that if I asked her now, she would say—  
'no.'"

Dal took three long puffs at his pipe, removed it from his mouth, and said in

a more earnest tone than he had yet used.

"Then don't; that is, if you are sure this isn't simply a fancy of yours. Why shouldn't the girl care for you? Except ——"


"Except what? Speak out, if I don't hear the truth from you, there's no one else to learn it from?"

"I always thought that school-master rôle of yours rather a mistake, I should drop it, the girl doesn't see the best of you, old boy, as even I do."

"Thanks," said Raymond, "perhaps you are right; I had fancied it would draw us nearer together."

"Much you know about it," was Dal's inward comment, but he only answered,

"Well! it may. I'm no judge, but



suppose, for a change, you try another tack. By the way, I suppose there are not two Hotspurs in the field."

"No. That is, not at present; but now that she's going out, confound it!"

"You are a regular Turk," said Dal. "I believe you would like to shut the poor child from all eyes but your own; she won't stand that, mind, and I shouldn't advise you to try it."

"You think I've been too masterful."

"How can I tell, my dear fellow? You must know best." Dal saw that Raymond had taken his hint, and so relapsed into sleepy good-nature.

"*A propos!*" he added, after a short pause, "when are you going to take me to call on Mrs. Treherne?"



"Whenever you like, but she and Victoire are coming to tea at my rooms to-morrow, will you join us?"

"Delighted! what is Mrs. Treherne like?"

"Tall and grand, a regular Cornish beauty."

"Whew! I fancied her a lady of fifty with a very large small to her back."

Raymond laughed. "She is a lady of thirty-three, with straight features, and a white skin, big blue eyes and yellow hair; what you might fancy Freya, or Brunhilda, and such a figure, she beats Victoire out and out as to mere beauty."

"Say no more, I'd come if you lived a hundred miles away."

"Well, good bye! by the way, Vic-

toire and I ran against your goddess to-day in the gardens, Nellie St. Claire."

"You don't mean it! how?"

Raymond narrated the adventure, Dal listening.

"Some people have all the luck," he said, when Raymond had concluded. "I'd have pawned my watch for such an opportunity of speaking to her, the darling; and you, I suppose, hurried away, lest your cousin should be contaminated by her presence."

There was some truth in the remark, and Mr. Marchant felt it, though he only answered,

"Oh! Victoire fell quite in love with her."

"I'm glad to hear she has such good taste. You are not going already?"

"Must. I have some work to do, and not too much time to do it in, as I dine at Thurloe Square to-night."





## CHAPTER XIV.

"I have a smiling face, she said,  
I have a jest for all I meet,  
I have a garland for my head,  
And all its flowers are sweet,  
And so you call me gay, she said."

MRS. BROWNING.—"THE MASK."

**I**T was a few days after Nellie's and Victoire's meeting in Kensington Gardens, and Miss St. Claire was seated in her little drawing-room, pretending to study a new part, in reality doing nothing at all.

She had taken the advice her husband had given in scorn, and had of late tried to rise in her profession, by devoting herself less to burlesque and more to the legitimate drama, if that terrific expression can be held to include the lightest of light comedy.

Her efforts were successful, and the part she was now engaged on was a tender and graceful one, and the chief interest of the piece; but this afternoon she could not fix her ideas on its pretty unreal love passages.

It was a rainy day, steadily and hopelessly wet; Nellie had seen no one, and had not been out that day; with a little yawn she threw her book aside and took up one of Ouida's novels, only to read a page or two and yawn again, then she did a very few stitches in a piece of em-

broidery, tired of it, and looked out of the window.

There was nothing there but rain, and the fresh young leaves of the lime-trees in the tiny, front garden, so she turned away and tried to sing, but she was out of voice, and the piano out of tune; as a last resource she knelt down and tried to play with Doodah, but even that was rather a failure, for Doodah was enjoying a nap, and didn't want to be disturbed.

At this point there was a ring at the door-bell; Nellie sprang to her feet, teased out and sleeked down her ruffled hair, arranged her dress, and began to pull about the leaves of a fern, but as Mr. Mattocks was announced, all her little affectations vanished, and she exclaimed naturally,


" Oh, Dick, I am so glad to see you, but what made you come on such a dreadful day? I was so dull that I was thinking if I could drown myself in the gutter. I believe there's water enough."

" I hope my boots aren't muddy," said Mr. Mattocks, glancing at his extremities with evident solicitude. " I've just been to see my brother, and I thought I might as well drop in here."

" Indeed! what an honour for me. There, I don't mean to be disagreeable, only sit down."

Mr. Mattocks laughed, and obeyed; he was a large, lazy man, and spoke slowly, he was a sterling actor on the stage, and there were few men more generally liked off it.

" Are these your new photos?" he



said, taking up a packet that lay on the table.

"Yes; do you like them? the dress was sweet."

"And thirty years out of date; these necklaces," and he pointed out one in a photo of a dress of George the First's reign, "didn't come in till 1767."

"Oh! everybody isn't a walking costume-dictionary as you are, I shall borrow American slang and say, 'it's all the same, Dutch.'"

"Ah! *àpropos* of that; is what I saw in the papers last week true?"

"Can't say, I'm sure; I should think not."

"You know what I mean."

"About my going to America."

"Yes."

"You don't like it."



"How do you know that?"

"By your voice; but why don't you?"

"It isn't my affair, but——"

"But what, Dick? say what you mean, you are an old friend, and a good one."

"My dear girl, why should I speak if you won't take my advice?"

"Perhaps not, but I should like to hear it."

"Do you mean me to speak in earnest?" he said, in an altered tone, and leaning forward.

"Yes."

"Why are you going? Is the contract signed?"

"No; but I send it off to-day. Why shouldn't I go? It's a good offer and change, and I shall like the journey."

"I think it's a great risk; it may spoil your life."

"There isn't much to spoil."

He went on as though he had not heard her,

"American success is a lottery, and your leaving England may ruin your career here; besides, child, if you want the whole truth, I don't like the idea of your going to America alone."

Nellie laughed, such a shrill though sweet laugh, that it was almost hysterical.

"You don't think I can take care of myself there, as well as I can here; I'm much obliged to you."

"You know I don't mean that, but all the same, it isn't fit for you."

"If I were a girl fresh from the school-room, instead of an actress who has been


ten years on the boards, you couldn't speak more properly. I suppose I ought to be grateful to you, though, for implying I've still a shred of my good name left to preserve; suppose I tell you, I don't care that for it," snapping her fingers, "what will you say then?"

"That you are telling an untruth, I know you well enough for that."

Her face softened.

"I know whom I ought to thank that I have a rag of character left, who has stood up for me even when I haven't deserved it. You are very good, Dick," she said, simply.

"Then I wish you would be very good, too, and give up this d——d American scheme. There's no earthly reason for your leaving England, that I can see."



"Isn't there, Dick?" she said, passionately; "there's every reason I should be away from him."

"Frank, do you mean? but why should you wish that? You hardly ever meet, he never troubles you."

"Troubles me! do you think he is likely to of his own free will? Isn't the mere feeling we are in the same town trouble and torture enough to us both? We shall never come together again, you know that as well as I do."

"Poor child."

"Yes, you understand—there, I am ashamed to let even you see me like this," as a great tear rolled down her cheek; "but I can trust you, you will never let any one know I still care for him."

"What can I say to comfort you, Nellie?"

"Nothing, there is no comfort; I cut my own throat, and I must bear it alone."

Her head sank on her breast, her hands dropped listlessly at her sides: Dick Mattocks rose and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"There's one thing I can say, you are Frank's wife still, and his honour is in your keeping."

"I have used it well," she said, without looking up.

"Not so badly as you might have; but let that pass and guard it now."

"Why? there is no hope for the future."

"Only this, I know Frank's love for

you is dead ; but you might win back his respect."

"For what good?"

"For your own; Nell, forgive my speaking plainly, why should you try to make the world believe you worse than you are?"

"To pain Frank," she answered, fiercely, "as he has pained me; yes, it's true, though I love him. Indeed it will be better for me to go to America, I shall be happier a long way away from him. I am miserable here, yes, and jealous," she added, clenching her hand, and trying to force back the tears that would come; "jealous whenever I hear of his flirting or dancing attendance on another woman, and you know the fuss people make of him. If you knew how wretched

I am, sometimes, you would say I had better go."


"I hate America."

"Why? are the Yankees so very fascinating?" Here her smile broke out from behind her tears. "Never mind me, I'll take good care of myself and get a sheep-dog, your remonstrance has done that good. Can you find me one, warranted fierce?"

"That will be better than nothing, but——"

"I'm tired of the subject, let's change it; tell me about your new part, or some gossip, or anything, but for goodness sake don't talk any more about me."

"Very well," said Mr. Mattocks, tranquilly.



---

" I know I'm very cross, ring the bell,  
and you shall have a B. and S. to make  
up for my very bad temper."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON :

Printed by A. Schulze, 13, Poland Street.

(S. & H.)

1





11





